



Exhibition 1900

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~~MAGGREGOR, MRS. MARY ESTHER~~
(MILLER)

LIVING LIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A VENDETTA IN VANITY FAIR

ROSABEL.

A PROPHET OF THE REA .

LIVING LIES

BY
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CHAPTER I

THE HAVEN

IT was six o'clock. The sun had just dipped beneath the ocean, and a sudden gloom befell the bleak, wind-swept uplands and the village nestling in the rugged bosom of the hills. The brief hush which accompanies the death of day took possession of all things; even the Atlantic tide, murmuring sullenly on the rocks three hundred feet below, seemed to pause half a beat like a great heart at tension, and the voices of the birds were stilled.

At the window of The Haven stood Rachel Garth. She was twenty-two years old—a black-haired, white-skinned girl, slim, supple, tall. Potential passion lurked in her great sombre eyes, in the wistful droop of her lips, in the attitude, unconsciously dramatic, which her expectation assumed. If she had not been born on this wild Cornish coast she had lived the greater part of her life here, and the stress of wind and wave had entered her soul.

A frail-looking, white-haired woman, who was seated at the fireside, looked up.

"The train must be late, Rachel."

"Or perhaps he has been delayed in London and isn't coming to-day at all," remarked a younger girl, who was the only other occupant of the room.

Rachael frowned impatiently.

"You always speak before you think, Mamie. In that case he would have sent a telegram, of course, and St John would have come home alone. Is the kettle boiling?"

The table was laid for tea. It was a Cornish tea, appetising

and substantial, with saffron cake, and "heavy" cake, and clotted cream, and a hint, in the knives and forks beside each plate, of the hot pasty which would make its appearance when the proper time came.

The copper kettle on the hob had just asserted its state of preparedness for the return of the elder son by boiling over with a loud hiss, when the dilapidated waggonette, which plied twice a day with passengers and parcels between the village of Carnruan and Craddoc Station, made an appearance on that strip of high-road which was visible from The Haven, and stopped before the Pilchard Inn.

There were two passengers besides a village woman with a basket; and Mamie, who had rushed to the window, shrieked with the joyful spontaneity of seventeen years and flowing hair:

"Here they are!"

She dashed, hatless, from the house; and Mrs Garth rose trembling, and anxiously swept the tea-table with her eyes, to see that nothing had been forgotten. Rachel turned, silent and tense, from the window, which was no longer a point of vantage. If she had not run, like her younger sister, to meet Stephen, it was not that she loved him less, but that her emotion was too deep to find relief in such display.

Two minutes later Dr Garth entered. His first kiss was for his mother; then he turned to Rachel, who clasped him round the neck. The resemblance between the brother and sister was striking at this moment. He was dark also, and his deep-set eyes, more brilliant than the girl's, seemed to pierce to the very heart of things. The man's broad white forehead, his strong profile, his fine figure and decisive voice, visibly marked him, at thirty-two years old, as one of those favourites of fortune upon whom all physical and mental gifts have been bestowed. It was written on his face that he would rise higher than most men, or fall lower; that he would touch heaven, or, missing it, reach hell.

At present he was rising, rising rapidly. He came home to Carnruan flushed with success, to bring his good news to the women and younger brother who loved him.

"Mother, Rachel, Mamie, congratulate me! I have been appointed resident physician to the Metropolitan Hospital. It

isn't only the honour, but the salary! Now I shall be able to look after you all properly, thank God ; no more stint in the house-keeping, mater ; plenty of new frocks, girls! And St John will be able to leave off stuffing Latin into the heads of Wetherby's schoolboys, and cram his own with theology all day long. It has been my ambition for a long time to get a post of this kind, but I had no hope of succeeding yet awhile. I am young, in fact," he added with pardonable complacency, "for a resident physician."

There was a chorus of delight from Mrs Garth and the girls ; and St John, a young fellow of twenty-one, with fair colouring like Mamie, and the delicate, clear-cut features of a cameo, turned glowing eyes on the fire. He was a priest already by nature, and could now hope soon to be a priest in fact. His patience was to be rewarded. In a gush of joy and gratitude he could have thrown his arms, as Rachel had done, round his brother's neck.

Dr Garth laughingly protested that he was ravenous, to stave off threatening emotions, and the family sat down to the evening meal. Stephen found everything delicious—the pasty, the home-made bread, the tea itself. It was evident that he was deeply attached to his home and his people, although his inexhaustible energy would have beaten itself to death, like a caged eagle, in this rock-bound village of the sea if he had been forced to dwell there always.

"And how is Colonel Carew?" he inquired. "And—and Marion?"

He had already asked the same question of St John during their five-mile drive, but perhaps he had forgotten it in the pleasant bustle of arrival, or the answer concerned him so nearly that he could not refrain from demanding it again.

"The Colonel has had a bad cough, but Marion is very well," replied Rachel, smiling. "Have you seen Vivian lately?"

"No," said Garth. "The young scoundrel has not been . ar me for ever so long. I did not even know he was in town."

"He was in London last month," said Rachel thoughtfully, "but he is home again now." She had ceased to smile. "I wonder he did not go to see you."

"Yes ; it is a bad sign," said Mrs Garth. "He used to be so devoted to you, Stephen ; he still thinks, I am sure, that there

is no one like you on earth. I hope his keeping away does not mean the lad is getting into mischief. I always told his father how dangerous it was for a young man to lead a life of idleness, and I hope he may not realise the truth of the warning too late. Certainly Vivian has not been himself since his last visit to London. Marion tells me he is depressed, restless, and out of sorts, as though there were something on his mind."

Mrs Garth leaned back in her chair with the air of those who stand at a window to watch their fellow-mortals cross a muddy road in the rain. *Her* sons were irreproachable. The self-righteousness was unconscious. She was a pious woman, and took little credit to herself for doing a duty which had become plain to her through prayer, and bringing up her children in the way they should go.

"I daresay Master Vivian only needs a tonic," said Dr Garth humorously. "I must stroll up to Poldinnick this evening, and look at his tongue! By the way, what of the old doctor? I saw his name in *The Times* the other day connected with some story about an outbreak of small-pox on the Island. Is it true?"

"Only too true, alas!" said St John. "The disease seems to have been brought there by a sailor returning home, and it is spreading all over the Island. Of course, the virulence of the epidemic is due chiefly to the obstinacy and ignorance of the poor wretches themselves. They shirk vaccination as though it were an unholy rite which would cost them their souls! Poor old Macdonald is working day and night, by all accounts."

"He is behaving like a hero," supplemented Rachel. "Imagine, Stephen! There is no hospital on the Island; he has nobody to help him; the people here are so alarmed that it is as much as he can do to get them to bring medicines and food and the letters and leave them on the beach. And the fishermen are too poor to give him anything but gratitude in return."

"No doubt the consciousness of having done his duty will be sufficient reward," said Dr Garth gravely. "Thank God, there are many men in the profession with a noble and unselfish devotion to the cause of humanity."

When the meal was over, and Rachel and Mamie had assisted

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their one domestic to clear away, Mrs Garth found herself alone for a moment with her elder son.

"Stephen," she whispered, "is the door shut? How about *him*? Your name will be in the papers; you will be getting known and talked about. Aren't you afraid that he may turn up, now it seems worth while? A son who is doing well would seem a little gold mine to him. If he should reappear, more sodden and degraded than ever, to batten upon your money, and overwhelm you with the shame of such a father!" She shuddered all through her attenuated frame, her thin, bloodless hands locked in her lap. "The very idea chills my blood! He would drag you down like a dead weight tied to your neck; he would ruin you; he would ruin us all!"

"I have thought of it already," said Garth in a low tone, "and have taken precautions. Some time ago I instructed a private detective agency to find him for me. I intended to give him a pension to reside abroad—under another name than ours; the relief of knowing that he was safely out of the way would have been worth the expense. But he is not to be found. They think it is useless to continue the search. The assumption is that he is dead."

"I dare not believe it," said Mrs Garth, with a deep breath. "Something always tells me that we did not escape for ever from your father's clutches when I fled with you children fifteen years ago. I don't often speak of the past, Stephen, and to the younger ones, thank Heaven, it is a blank. But it haunts me—oh, it haunts me still! By day I fancy his footsteps behind me; by night I start from sleep to hear him lurching up the stairs! It is the dread of my life that one day the peacefulness of this secluded retreat will be broken. It would kill me to see him again!"

"You shall not see him again," said Dr Garth resolutely. "Have no fear, mother. I should be ungrateful indeed for all you have done for me if I allowed the autumn of your life to be rendered wretched by my father or any other man. Not one woman in ten thousand would have had the courage to cut herself adrift as you did, and bury herself in this obscure spot to rear four children on the remnant of a fortune. You reckoned

on your sons for the future, and you did not reckon in vain. Now it is my turn to protect and care for you. Leave everything to me."

"My son!" exclaimed Mrs Garth with deep emotion. "My dearest, best-loved son!"

He leaned over her arm-chair, and kissed her on the cheek.

"I should have grown up under my father's influence if it had not been for you," he said. "I owe more to you than any man ever owed to his mother. But we have done with him; you may rest easy on that score. If he were living my detectives would have discovered him. Probably he was buried under an alias long ago, and we shall not even know the whereabouts of his grave."

"Perhaps you are right," she said. "But I dread—I dread him still. It is the good and useful lives that die early; the evil ones live long to sow curses in their path."

"Don't be sad this evening," he said, "or I shall take it as an ill omen for me. I feel in the most cheerful, hopeful mood. My little bit of success has made a boy of me. And I want your good wishes—and your blessing, mother."

"Both are always yours, Stephen!"

He was gazing through the window at the turrets of a grey stone mansion which stood bleakly on the hill.

"I want them more than ever to-night," he said. "I am going up to Poldinnick to see Marion Carew."

CHAPTER II

A BIRD OF PREY

POLDINNICK stood on a hill to the west of the village, with fine sea and land views. The present house was modern, having been rebuilt by Colonel Carew's grandfather in the early Victorian period. He must have been a man of taste, nevertheless, for he had preserved the chief feature of the interior—a fine hall reputed to be the remains of the Norman abbey which had once occupied the site—and the exterior might have been worse. The neutral

tone of the bleak country was well preserved by the stone, quarried close at hand, of its solid walls, and it faced the Atlantic gales with the indifference of the rock-bound coast itself.

Colonel Carew was a Cornishman to the marrow of his bones. He thought there was no country in the world like England, and no county in England like Cornwall, and no house in Cornwall like his own. When visitors—"foreigners"—suggested that Poldinnick would be the better for a little shelter and a few trees, he could scarcely conceal his scorn. It was good air, and plenty of it, which bred men with muscle and bone. The Carews of Poldinnick were no race of puny weaklings, thank the Lord, who needed coddling!

The Colonel himself was six feet in his stockings, and his only son a hair's breadth the taller of the two. A handsome fellow, Vivian Carew, at the age of twenty-three: sunny-haired, blue-eyed, athletic, broad in the shoulder, lean in the flank, and possessed of sufficient wit to make himself agreeable to women at least. Just down from Oxford, where he had not studied, because there had been so many other things to do, he was fortunate in being able to regard life from the standpoint of a rich man's son. Perhaps by-and-by he would go into the Yeomanry, but he would never be obliged to work for bread.

Under such happy circumstances it should not have been difficult for a young man to look cheerful; nevertheless, he left the house after dinner on the evening of Dr Garth's return, and walked down the carriage road in the direction of the village lights in a most unenviable frame of mind. Night had fallen long ago, and a brilliant moon had risen which revealed every pebble in the way. But, dark or light, Vivian knew the familiar road by heart, and strode along moodily, his hands thrust into the pockets of his topcoat, his cap pulled over his eyes. Midway he encountered Dr Garth.

"Ah, Vivian! Well met!"

"How are you, Stephen?"

The two men stopped, and exchanged the hearty grip of old friendship.

"I hope you were on your way to see me?" asked Garth.

"Yes; I was going to call," replied young Carew hesitatingly,

"but—but Marion has asked me to take a message to the Vicarage for her. I shall be back in half-an-hour."

"Right," said Garth.

Vivian lingered a moment.

"Everybody well at The Haven?"

"Yes, thanks."

"You seem pretty fit yourself. The governor and Marion will be pleased to see you. Don't get talked out before I return."

They nodded to each other, and parted, and Vivian relapsed into the gloominess which the encounter had briefly disturbed.

One of those low, weather-stained walls, overgrown by lichen and moss, which are common in North Cornwall, enclosed the bare acres of Poldinnick, to which a plain five-barred gate gave admittance. Vivian let the gate clang to behind him; then paused. He was on the public road, and the village straggled through the hollow on the right, while the lane which led to the Vicarage branched up the hill adjoining Poldinnick.

His hesitation ended he passed the Vicarage turning, and went on to the village, insensibly quickening his steps, and with the heightened colour and furtive eyes of a man who is half ashamed of himself.

The autumn nights were chilly in these parts, and there were few people about; but lights shone in the windows of the low stone cottages, and the Pilchard Inn exuded a cheerful glow from its red linen blinds.

Vivian Carew opened the door marked "Hotel" and entered, and the landlady, catching sight of him from the adjacent bar, wiped the beer froth from her hands, and came out, buxom and smiling, to greet him.

"Good-evening, Mr Carew."

"Good-evening, Mrs Pennyquick," said Vivian hurriedly. "Is there a person here called Joe Williams?"

"Yes, sir. In the parlour, if you please." She opened the door for him. "I am afraid," she added apologetically, "he ain't in a very nice state to receive a gentleman like you, sir—the dirty old beast! I sha'n't be sorry when he takes himself off again."

The individual for whom Vivian's visit to the Pilchard was

designed certainly did not present an attractive appearance at this moment. He was an oldish man, judging from his grizzled hair, and shabby; and he sat with his head and arms upon the table, an empty glass beside him, and a shattered clay pipe on the floor at his feet. His boots were caked with the mud of the heavy Cornish roads, and the state of his clothes proclaimed that he had had more than one tumble in getting here, and had not even troubled to brush off the soil as it dried.

Vivian drew back, revolted by the closeness of the room and the reek of the spirits, which had been slopped on to the checked table-cloth by the drunkard's unsteady hand.

"Faugh!" he exclaimed in disgust. "The man's drunk!"

He had a mind to go away again, but dared not. It was not for the pleasure of Mr Joe Williams' society that he had come, and it was useless to leave with his purpose unfulfilled.

The drunkard, muttering hoarsely and incoherently, uttered one distinct word—a name:

"Rachel!"

It struck upon Vivian's ear like a blow. That such foul lips should utter the name that was the most sacred in the world to him! It was profanation. He flushed from his sunburnt throat to the roots of his fair hair, and caught Williams by the shoulder.

"Wake up!" he cried. "What do you mean by talking about 'Rachel,' you old scoundrel!"

"Rachel, Rachel," mumbled Mr Williams again. "Yes, m'wife Rachel. Sha'n' a man talk 'bout s'own wife?"

"Oh, your wife," said Vivian, as though relieved.

"I was always a lovin' husband," whined the drunkard. "But women are all alike. It's money, money with 'em. You touch their pockets and away they go. . . . I tell you I've seen better days. Yes, sir! I've driven in m'own carriage before now."

Vivian shook him.

"I have had enough of your maudlin reminiscences," he said. "Was it to regale me with them that you asked me to meet you here? What do you want? I am not going to wait all night. You're drunk again. You are always drunk."

The shaking seemed to have some effect, for Mr Williams sat

up, revealing the blotchy yellow face of the habitual drunkard, adorned by a beard of three days' growth. It was evident that he had been stout a few years ago, but had now reached the lean stage, when a man who consumes a bottle of brandy per diem begins to dry up. The skin bagged under his bleary eyes and stubbly chin; and his hands, with their dirty nails, looked like the claws of an aged bird.

"Me drunk?" he said with great dignity. "Yer dunno what you're talking about, young man. I've on'y had one glass, on th' honour of a gen'leman—*one glass*! Is this y'r welcome to an ole an' faithful frien', whose come all the way from London to see yer?"

Vivian ground his teeth, and his blue eyes flashed.

"You alluded in your scrawl to 'urgent business.' Once more, what do you want?"

"Money, of course," said Mr Williams, suddenly distinct. "The loan of a fifty-poun' note from my dear frien', who I've come all the way from London to see!"

"And why on earth should I lend fifty pounds to a drunken blackguard like you?" demanded Vivian.

"Out of pure kindness of heart, of course," said Williams, with a leer. "What else?"

Vivian, who had been sitting on the edge of the table, stood up and buttoned his coat.

"You've wasted your time," he said, "and put yourself to useless expense. I am not a millionaire to be able to shower fifty-pound notes among promiscuous acquaintances."

"I'm cleaned out," said Williams. "I spent my last twenty-five bob on the return ticket to this Gawd-forsaken hole."

"I am sorry you reckoned on me," replied Vivian, relenting a little out of pure good nature. "I might spare you a fiver, if that's any good?"

"It isn't. I want fifty," said Williams sullenly. His speech was clearing, and it was possible to suspect that he had once been a gentleman. He lurched to the sideboard, where there was a jug of water, drenched his handkerchief with it, and wiped his face. "Yes, fifty; do you hear?—not a shilling less. You're a rich man's son; it isn't a button off your coat. And if it is,

what business is that of mine? You take my advice, and pay up like a gentleman, Vivian Carew."

"You insolent scoundrel," said Vivian, "are you attempting to bully me? One would think I was in your debt. Pay up, indeed!"

"Yes; pay up," repeated Mr Williams, with ferocious banter, "for your little amusements, my chicken. I sha'n't cost you ten per cent. of what they've cost you already, and'll cost you again; or I'll go straight to your father and tell him about your pranks on the turf."

"So that's your game, is it?" shouted Vivian in a rage. "I'll see you hanged first!"

As their voices had risen unconsciously the voices in the adjoining tap-room had ceased, and at this moment Mr Pennyquick put his head in at the door.

"Did you call, sir?" he asked Vivian.

"No," said Vivian sharply.

The landlord bestowed a final glance of curiosity on the two men and withdrew.

"You see, I happen to know all about you—no matter how," resumed Mr Williams in a lower tone, waving a dirty hand aloft. "Your honourable, straight-laced dad was bitten with the same mania when he was a youngster, and got dipped pretty heavily, and once bit twice shy. No man expects his son to run so straight as the man who ran crooked himself; that's a fact of natural history. You've been precious sharp to keep your little game dark so long, haven't you? But you've got to pay, sonnie, you've got to pay. We all have to pay sooner or later, you take an old man's word for it. I'm paying myself!"

The healthy colour of Vivian's cheeks had faded to grey under the tan. He clenched his teeth, and longed to throttle this old scoundrel, whose tainted breath sickened him. The idea of submitting to blackmail was galling in the extreme, but what else could he do? It was a fact that he was in a hole. Turf transactions had been rigorously forbidden him by his father, and although Colonel Carew was an indulgent father in some respects he was a martinet in others, and demanded absolute obedience from his son. He had never forgotten how, in his own hot

youth, he had nearly wrecked the family name and honour, which he held higher than anything in the world; and Vivian was well aware that gambling of this sort was the one unpardonable sin.

And, to do the young man justice, it was not only of himself that he thought. His father would be disappointed in him; it would be such a shock to the old soldier to discover that his son was not all he believed.

Vivian's face softened; a little moisture dimmed the fire in his eyes. He knew it was rash to yield to this extortion, and he might be laying up fresh trouble for himself; but it was his nature, affectionate, careless, weak, to postpone the consideration of anything disagreeable, to depend sanguinely on time to smoothe away a difficulty, to make an easy sacrifice rather than that those he cared for should think ill of him. His father loved him, and his cousin Marion, who had been as his sister since they were children; and there were the Garths too—Stephen, Rachel. . . . Why shock his little world, and lose its confidence for ever for the sake of fifty pounds? He made a resolve to amend at once, then this blackleg, whom he had known under a dozen aliases, would have nothing to talk about. Anyhow he would probably drink himself to death with so much ill-earned cash in his pockets, and would be heard of no more.

"All right," said Vivian reluctantly, "you shall have the fifty pounds. But don't imagine you are establishing a precedent, and can wring another cent out of me. This is the last."

Joe Williams chuckled.

"Now you talk sense," he said. "Got the flimsies on you?"

"No," said Vivian. "I shall have to go home and get them." He frowned thoughtfully. "I'm not coming here to see a blackguard like you again; it looks bad. Meet me by the Logan Stone at ten o'clock."

"What the deuce do you mean by the Logan Stone?" asked Williams.

"The Rocking Stone," explained Vivian impatiently. "Go up the road past the church, and keep along the cliffs till you come to it. There's a footpath, and it's big enough to be seen. You can't miss your way on a night like this."

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"You be there, that's all ; no larks," growled Mr Williams as Vivian opened the parlour door, "or I'll soon make it the worse for you."

CHAPTER III

HEAVEN AND HELL

WHILE Vivian Carew was out his cousin Marion sat alone in her favourite place, the old hall of Poldinnick.

Looking at the girl's face one could understand what a deep appeal antiquity made to her. There was nothing modern in her temperament. She liked the quiet of the country better than the rush of town ; the life of contemplation better than the life of action, which gives no time for thought. Her grave grey eyes, the pure oval of her face, her complexion as delicately pink and white as a sea-shell, her finely-pencilled brows and light brown hair, which parted in the centre to ripple over brows and ears, might have belonged to a Madonna of the fifteenth century. She seemed a component part of the old hall, with its stone pillars and narrow, deep-set windows, as she gazed into the glowing heart of the fire.

She was an orphan, but she had never felt lonely. When her mother died, ten years ago, her uncle had taken her home, and her place at Poldinnick had been that of a beloved daughter and sister ever since. That she possessed a fortune in her own right she scarcely remembered, except when charity opened her purse. She had spent a couple of seasons in London, and might have married five years ago, if it had been the right man who had asked her.

The right man ! She knew him now ; she had known him then ; and hers was not a nature to change. There was nobody else possible, and if he never spoke, other men might as well remain silent all her life. But she thought he would speak some day. She had never really doubted it. It was just a question of how long her patience must hold out.

A lovely smile parted the girl's lips, and she bent nearer to the

fire, her hands locked in the lap of her quaint grey velvet gown. The light glanced on the silver chatelaine she wore and gleamed on the pearls round her throat. This morning an anonymous spray of white roses, nestling in moss, had arrived for her by the early post. They lay at this moment upon her breast, and their perfume aroused an odd emotion within her, half excitement, half peace.

There were pictures in the fire. She deciphered them one by one. A man's face came first of all—first in the fire as first in her heart—and then there was a church, and by-and-by a child. The smile grew tremulous. The child—yes, of course, the child! But a big piece of black coal had fallen, blotting out the figures, which she could not reconstruct—or perhaps the sound of an opening door had dispelled the day-dream which had created them.

She looked up quickly, her breath fluttering, the colour heightening in her cheeks. It was Stephen Garth who had entered; one of the figures had stepped out of the fire!

She rose, but did not go to meet him. Her outstretched hand waited for his, and her eyes.

"How are you, Stephen? I did not know you had come!"

"You were upstairs when I arrived," he said. "I have been in the smoking-room talking to the Colonel. He sent me to look for you."

"Vivian has gone out," she said, with the haste of nervousness. "He will be sorry to have missed you."

"I met him," replied Garth, smiling, "but the faithful messenger would not return until he had fulfilled your bidding!"

"My bidding?" she repeated, with a puzzled look.

"He was going to the Vicarage for you, I understood?"

She was surprised, but said no more, and Garth added:

"How have you been, Marion? You look well."

"I *am* well," she responded.

They still gazed at each other; he still held her hand, as though he had forgotten to let it go.

"And you have not missed me?"

"I did not say that," she replied simply. "You know I am always pleased when you come home. Isn't it a rather sudden and unexpected visit?"

"Yes," he said. "I did not hope to get away again so soon. But I thought I deserved a holiday before I took up my new post—and—I wanted to speak to you, Marion."

The girl bowed her hot face over his roses. The movement must have displaced them, for a thorn suddenly pricked her breast through the lace.

She gave an exclamation, followed by a little laugh, and touched the flowers.

"Your roses have sharp thorns, Stephen!"

"You knew they came from me!" he said.

"I guessed."

"And you wear them," he said softly, "thorns and all! Oh, Marion, all the way down in the train I was wondering whether this was to be the happiest or most miserable day of my life! It is for you to decide. I have just obtained an appointment which will enable me to make things quite comfortable at The Haven, and yet support a separate establishment of my own. The moment I have been looking forward to for years has come."

"I am very glad," she murmured, "for your sake. You deserve success, Stephen. You are a good man."

"Are you glad only for my sake?" he asked. "Ah, Marion, you know, you must know, why I have worked so strenuously, hoped so eagerly, longed so passionately for the money without which a man who respects himself can only gaze in hungry silence at the woman he loves! There have been times when impatience has tortured me with the pains of hell! I have begun a dozen letters of entreaty; often I have been tempted to come down without warning and pour out my heart to you. I even went to the station and took a ticket to Craddoc once. But after all I managed to restrain myself and wait"—his voice trembled—"and wait for to-night."

"For to-night," she repeated, whispering.

From her eyes, briefly raised, beamed the soft radiance of altar lights.

"You love me!"

"For me also," she said, "there have been the pangs of hope deferred, the hunger, the suspense."

"God bless you!"

His dark face flushed, and his hand went out to hers passionately; clung to it. He drew her to his arms, seeking her lips. But at the last she shrank a little in virginal fear of the man she had known so long.

"Stephen! Stephen!"

"But you are mine, are you not?"

"Yes. . . . Yet it is strange still." She hid her face suddenly against his neck. "Just now you were only my friend, and you took my hand, and I could smile at you. My heart is so full. . . . How long have you loved me?"

"Since you were a little girl, I think. Surely when you were sixteen years old."

"And Jacob served for Rachel seven years," she quoted softly. "I was twenty-three last birthday, Stephen."

"I know," he said. "They have been long years, but I shall have my reward—when you grant me my first kiss!"

"Oh, you shall have it now—now!" she cried. "How could I make you wait another moment, you loyal lover, you faithful soul!" And, moved by a sort of transport, she took his head in her hands, and kissed him full upon the lips. "I love you, I love you, Stephen," she said. "Never forget that you will always be more to me than all the world."

They stood by the fire afterwards; she was leaning on his shoulder, and his arm was round her waist. He told her that his mother and her uncle had known of his intention to speak to her, and had wished him well. Although she was her own mistress he was glad that the Colonel did not disapprove. It would have hurt his pride to be unwelcome in her family.

A woman of coarser fibre would have chided him for allowing his poverty to keep them apart so long while she was rich. Marion did not even mention her money to him at all. It did not enter her head that Stephen could have acted differently. There was no question of mine and thine between them; but her respect for him had demanded that the man should be the bread-winner, head of the household in fact as well as in name. And she was proud of him for the strength which had held his passion in check and forced them to wait for the more perfect consummation.

As Jacob served for Rachel! She might have pitied him if he had come to her too soon, but she would not have loved him as she loved him to-day.

He knew it, and his pulses leaped under the laurels of the conqueror which her hand placed on his brow. The wounds and fatigue of battle were forgotten; the seal of her lips to a lifelong union, the worship of her eyes, told him what he had won.

For the first time in their lives they parted that night with an embrace, and Garth left the house with throbbing pulses and head on fire. He was tasting the strongest wine of life—success; and he had the right to exult, for he had made no sacrifice of self-respect on the way, as so many have to do. He had arrived at the longed-for goal with honour. And he was a young man, and in love, and the ball of the world was at his feet.

He could not go quietly home to bed with burning temples and superactive brain. It was only half-past nine, and the cool night air tempted him to remain out of doors. Instead of going down hill towards the village he left the Colonel's grounds by the footpath which ran along the cliffs to the Rocking Stone. The night was peculiarly serene and still. A dead silence reigned. There was not even the bark of a dog, or a murmur from the sea, which shifted and shuddered like pale silver in the track of the moon.

Garth fixed his eyes on a distant revolving light, the only thing which seemed alive within view, and strolled on wrapt in thought.

Practical and ethical rather than religious, a humanitarian too concerned with this world to trouble about the next, it was the bright side of the medal which was uppermost to-night. If there was suffering there was also love; if there was vice there was virtue; if there were women whose evil lives handed down a curse through generations, there were also women like Marion. The physician, embittered by the very excess of his pity for the sufferings he had seen, had incontestable proof of God's handiwork in a girl's eyes.

Yes, the ball was at his feet; everything he had asked for had been granted him. He had been true to himself, to the best that was in him, and sincerity had brought its own reward. Gratified
tion, gratified love! He would not have changed places

with a king. With Marion by his side, to what eminence might he not attain? She would inspire him; her ardour would sustain his; her perfect sympathy with his aims would be the best spur a man could have. Their marriage would be truly a sacrament, an idyl, that perfect union of souls which marriage was meant to be. There was nothing he could wish changed. His conscience was easy with regard to his people; he could afford to give Marion a comfortable, even luxurious home, and his professional prospects were bright in the extreme. He had thrown all his energy into the career he had chosen, the work he loved, and the recognition which had already come assured him that he had not rated himself too highly or laboured in vain.

As a student, possessed by a passion for the art of healing, he had dreamed of a great discovery which would make him the benefactor of mankind. He dreamed the dream of his boyhood again to-night, under the inspiration of the moonlight and a woman's lips, realising the richness of his own vitality, the power and scope of his own brain. The horizon widened to infinitude; the indigo sky, with its transparent streaks of cloud, seemed but the veil of the mystery of mysteries which his hand might draw aside. He had never felt such belief in himself, and he was in the mood to accept it as a sign. As in a looking-glass he saw the future of his aim attained. He saw himself mounting higher and higher in his profession, encouraged always by her love, her faith, her sympathy. His cures became the talk of Europe; crowned heads sent for him; the great minds of the earth took him by the hand and called him "brother"; those honours were heaped upon him which mean fame; and he would value them only because they represented a sum of human misery allayed, and because she smiled and rejoiced with tears. The counsel of perfection! How beautiful it was! It gave him wings; his spirit floated in ether nearer God. Anything seemed possible in this moment of triumph and exaltation to the man who had won the woman he loved.

Suddenly a voice broke the silence—a voice husky with drink.

"Oh, you've come, sonnie! Have you got the money?"

A man's figure had risen beside the Rocking Stone in squalid silhouette against the moonlight, and Garth, startled out of his

reverie, came to a standstill and frowned. He was annoyed by the unwelcome interruption, and the voice in the darkness grated on his refined ear. It was a vulgar voice; it was hoarse; it had the loathsome Cockney twang. Whence came it at ten o'clock on an autumn night in Cornwall?

"You are making a mistake," he said coldly. "I am not the friend you seem to expect."

"Isn't it Carew?" asked the shadow suspiciously, peering at Garth.

"Carew!" repeated Garth in a tone of arrested attention. "Which Carew—the Colonel or his son?"

"What's it to do with you, I should like to know?" growled Joe Williams. "It's always best to ask no questions in this world, then you don't hear no lies!"

But Garth's curiosity was thoroughly aroused by this time. His quick wits had put two and two together already, and the result seemed to require investigation. Vivian's manner of late had inspired his friends with the idea that there was "something on his mind"; he had continued his way to the village this evening with an excuse which Garth, on reflection, perceived to be a lie, and the eager, half-bullying tone in which this man put his question sounded queer in the extreme. That he was a stranger to Carnruan Garth was certain from his accent, and that he was a disreputable stranger it was as easy to guess. Even in the moonlight the doctor's keen eyes could discern and read the story of the slouching gait, the dissolute stamp of the city-bred haunter of billiard-rooms and bars, the drink-soddened bird of prey for whom no garbage is too loathsome which affords a meal.

It cannot be accident which brought him so far from his usual beat," thought Garth, "and it cannot be the Colonel for whom he intended the epithet of 'sonnie.' This man's appearance bodes somebody no good. Were my mother's suspicions justified? Has Vivian really been getting into mischief?"

The doctor sighed, with a full knowledge of what young men are. But he was too fond of Vivian and too fond of the Colonel to withhold a helping hand. He felt that his engagement to Marion gave him some right to interfere in the affairs of her

family, apart from his old friendship for the Carews. He acted at this moment as though Vivian were his younger brother. He took a tone of authority with the man, perceiving that it would be the most effectual.

"May I inquire," he demanded quietly, "why you expect Mr Vivian Carew to bring money to you at this hour of the night?"

"That's his business and mine, not yours," said Williams. "You can ask him if you like."

"You are blackmailing him," said Garth boldly. "You think you've got some hold over him, and you are putting on the screw, but I'll soon stop that!"

"Oh, you will, will you?"

"Yes," said Garth.

Williams had had another glass to fortify himself against the cold before turning out of the Pilchard Inn, and it had not lessened his repulsiveness. He came a step or two nearer this unexpected antagonist, treading with the exaggerated care of the drunkard.

"Perhaps you don't think he's old enough to take care of himself?" he said. "P'raps you think he's a little pigeon to be plucked! Gammon! He's a wrong un, he is, and if he don't pay up——"

"Well? What then?" asked Garth calmly. "What will happen if you don't get the money?"

"*He* knows!" cried Mr Williams. "I'm going to Poldinnick—straight up to the front door like any other gen'leman. His father shall hear of his carryings on——"

"Oh, that's it!" said Garth. He laughed. "Do you imagine Colonel Carew will believe what *you* choose to say about his son? I shouldn't advise you to go near Poldinnick on that errand, unless you desire to be kicked out quicker than you came in. You may rest assured that I shall take the trouble to prepare a suitable reception for you!"

Mr Williams' wrath exploded in a mixture of drunken insolence and defiance. The drink had given him fictitious courage. He approached his bloated, purple face to Garth's, and his fist clenched.

"*You'll* take the trouble, *you'll* do this and that! Who the

devil are you, I should like to know, and what right have *you* to interfere!"

"He is my friend," said Garth sternly, "and anything I can do to protect him from a shark like you will certainly be done. And when you are sober you can come and talk to me. You can easily find out who I am. I live at The Haven, and my name is Dr Stephen Garth."

"Stephen Garth!" repeated Williams. "Stephen Garth!" He lurched forward and gripped the doctor by the shoulders. "Let me look at you! Show me your face!"

At the same moment the moonlight shone full upon his own face, and for the first time the two men—the young and successful physician, and the drink-sodden and bird of prey—gazed into each other's eyes.

"My God!" muttered Garth.

A wave of sickly heat ran over him; the fetid breath upon his face seemed to blight him body and soul. He staggered back, while a shriek of discordant laughter broke from the human beast.

"Dr Stephen Garth, and my son! So I've found you after all these years, have I? Oh, what luck! What a stroke of luck!"

"Hush!" said Stephen, white to the lips.

"Why?" asked his father in drunken bravado. "I'm not afraid of anybody knowing you are my son; I'm not ashamed of you! Let 'em all come—your precious friend Vivian Carew, and th' whole village at the back of him, t' see the union of a fond parent and his long-lost son!"

"Silence!" repeated Stephen hoarsely. "We cannot talk here!"

"I can talk anywhere," said Garth. "Have you lost your tongue? It seems to me you had plenty to say just now, and plenty of side to say it with too. You've sprung up since I saw you last, Steenie, my boy, but you were always a cheeky young devil, with your mother's temper. Doctor Stephen Garth! So you're a sawbones, are you? Doing prett' well, eh, Steenie? I see a watch and chain in your pocket and a good suit of clothes on your back. Is the old lady still above ground?"

"My mother is alive, if that is what you mean."

"And as pious and sour over her prayers as ever, I'll be bound!" He laughed; he was in a hilarious mood. "The girls and St John also well?"

"Yes."

"What is St John doing? Is he a sawbones too?"

"He is studying for the Church."

"A parson, O Lord; my son a parson! What a genteel family we are! The old lady isn't running all this with what she took away. Then you *are* doing well! Just think," said Mr Garth, apostrophising the stars, "that a man should 'a' been deprived of his loving wife and family s'long! An affectionate and—and d'mesticated man too, who asks no more than a quiet fireside, and his slippers on the hearth! Stephen, it was a cruel thing of y'r mother to hide away from me like that; but I'll forgive her—I forgive you all! I'll take you all back!"

Stephen Garth grasped the edge of the Rocking Stone, confronting his father from the shadow of this altar of a forgotten faith. For a moment despair had dug its talons into his heart, but the necessity for action braced him. What was not done now would never be done; and the peace and protection he had promised his mother, the honour of the name which he was about to bestow upon Marion, his own career and his brother's career, and his sisters' happiness, were at stake. They knew nothing, these younger ones, and they should never know. This one disgraceful life could not be allowed to ruin them all.

He was conscious of no tie of blood. The name of father was only associated in his mind with the horrors of his childhood and the dread of impending disgrace. It was as an enemy from whom he had to defend himself and those he loved that Stephen Garth contemplated the old man.

"It is very kind of you to offer to take us back," he said drily, "but you seem to misunderstand the position. My mother and sisters and brother are living under my protection, and it is not convenient that you should reside with them."

"Oh, that's your tone!" said Garth. "Here's a nice, dutiful son for you!"

"In fact, it is impossible. My mother objects to it, and the others are not even aware of your existence. But I do not wish

you to starve, and I very much desire you to live an honest life, so I am willing to make you a small allowance—conditionally."

"How much would the allowance be?" asked Mr Garth.

"One hundred a year paid quarterly."

"Humph! And the conditions?"

"That you take up your residence in another country," replied Stephen promptly, "and change your name, and allow none of us to hear of you again."

Mr Garth's countenance became purple with passion.

"I'll see you damned first!" he roared. "What! you're ashamed of me, are you? You're getting up in the world, and I'm not good enough for m' own son! You want to banish a lovin' husband and father from th' bosom of his family; but he don't see his way to oblige you. Give me m' own fireside, I say; m' own fireside, and the comforts of home." He hiccupped plaintively. "Where's The Haven, you unnatural offspring? Lend me your arm, and we'll go home and give th' old lady a pleasant surprise."

Stephen remained immovable, his pupils contracted, his jaw set.

"I will not have my mother disturbed," he said, still quietly. "You will take the pension I offered you on the condition named, or you will get nothing at all. It is a great deal more than you deserve."

"D'ye think I'm going to be dictated to by m' own son?" inquired Mr Garth, with the ominous calm which precedes a storm. "I've boxed your ears too many times, Master Stephen, to be letting you come the boss over me now! I tell you I'm going to give th' old lady a pleasant s'prise. Stand out of the way!"

"You don't pass here," said Stephen between his teeth.

"Oh, I don't, don't I? We'll see about that. Stand out o' th' way!"

"No," said Stephen.

With the howl of a wild beast Garth lunged at his son.

"If you weren't an old man," said Stephen menacingly, "and too drunk to know what you are doing! Keep your dirty hands off me!"

He was standing with his back to the sea, and as he spoke he stepped quickly aside, and Garth, intoxicated by passion as well as by drink, lost his balance and reeled to the edge of the cliff. There was an instant, appreciable by Stephen's tension, in which his father's arms beat the air like the wings of some gaunt bird, in which the squalid figure fought Fate savagely for life. Then it disappeared shrieking, shrieking, swallowed by the night, and Stephen Garth stood alone on the cliff.

"Stephen! My Gawd, Stephen!"

Stephen drew himself together with a shiver and looked over the edge.

His father had not fallen sheer. A steep grassy slope had arrested his flight, and he hung there sweating, agonised, with toes and fingers dug into the soil.

The scene was very peaceful. Above the stars gazed down with their quiet, indifferent eyes, and below the sea softly lapped the foot of the rocks. Not even a gull awoke to shriek a requiem.

As Stephen watched the old man slipped a little, and clung with his frantic claws again. He caught at a bit of ragged gorse, which stabbed his hands with a thousand needles and drew blood; but he held on to it until it came out by the roots, and he slid a little farther towards eternity.

Stephen's face was ghastly in the moonlight; the veins on his forehead were swollen, his teeth clenched. The devil and his good angel were fighting for his soul. It was his reputation, his career, the happiness of those he loved, against this evil, misspent life. Why should he indulge any sickly sentiment in the matter? He would not have thrown his father over the cliff, but, as the thing had happened, why should he interfere at such a cost? Anyhow it would be difficult to save a man, who was no longer young and active, from the position he was in. Help could only be given at the risk of the rescuer's life.

"My Gawd, Stephen! ain't you going to lend me a hand? I'm going."

A sudden sob broke from the doctor's lips. It was a man and his father after all.

He swung himself over the edge, feeling for foothold. But he had hesitated too long; his reluctant help was proffered too

late. At that moment Garth's hold relaxed, and he slipped and rolled down the declivity, and bounded off, a galvanised ball, into space.

CHAPTER IV

WHAT THE SEA GAVE UP

It was Sunday morning, and old Ben Rowe, the bellringer, was shuffling up the hill to the church, with the big key of the belfry dangling from one finger and a red comforter round his throat. The peaceful moonlight of last night had given way to a cold, lowering day, and a keen south-west wind slapped the old fellow in the face as he gained the churchyard gate. High ground, this, rivalling Poldinnick, and dominating the village and scattered inland farms; and the low-pitched roofs and gables of the church huddled together in the shelter of the solid Norman tower like sheep under the lea of a wall in a gale. Innumerable stains and patches diversified its rough stone, whence peered luminous apostles in glass, as though wondering how they came so far from sunny Italy. The usual wall of shale surrounded the churchyard, and the humble gravestones of slate, grey like the sky and sea, seemed fit memorials of the sons and daughters of this rugged countryside.

Another old fellow, who had been resting on the seat inside the porch, emerged to greet the bellringer as he approached.

"I thought mebbe I'd catch you if I was up early," said the crony. "Th' old woman 'll be glad if you'll 'ave a bit o' dinner with us to-day."

"I'm willin'," said Rowe. "There ain't a better pasty to be met in Carnruan than one finds at your table, Giles."

"Ay," said Giles, chuckling with satisfaction. "A nasty day, Ben. Bit of a sou'-wester brewing."

"Lord, I sha'n't reckon on it," said Ben, casting a weather eye gloomily at the sky. "There ain't been a decent storm since midsummer, and then it came to naught. Talk about hard times. I never see such a year. I ain't 'ad a corpse since the spring."

"No," mused Giles aloud; "that foreign chap was the last that came in, and he was in March. He had great gold rings in his ears, I remember, like a heathen idol."

"He's buried over there by the north wall," said Rowe. "Last year I had six of 'em. Ay, that *was* a year. But there don't seem to be no more wrecks in these parts. *He* needn't 'a' troubled hisself, 'pears to me. To think 'o' such a power o' money lying idle in th' bank!"

As he spoke the two men gazed reproachfully at a tablet in the wall. It was of stone, and green with damp and age, and it stated, in quaint lettering, how one Jabez Couche of Carnruan, master mariner, having died heirless on the 14th January 1734, did desire respect should be paid to the memory of every drowned seaman and other person whose body might be found on Carnruan strand, by the tolling of the said Carnruan bell, and that for the said purpose he, Jabez, did provide in his last will and testament, that the sum of one guinea should be paid to the bellringer for each service rendered as set forth.

"Ah, it's 'ard times," sighed Rowe. "There's Bathsheba Penrose lost her husband, but he ain't come ashore, which seems like sheer waste."

"I 'ear Miss Rachel's making up money for the widder an' the orphan. They say Mr Tregenna over at St Ruth's given her ten poun' for 'em."

"Ten poun'? Well, it don't mean much to him. By all accounts, 'The Talk o' th' Vale' is the richest tin mine in Cornwall, and he's just burstin' with money. I mind the time, not so long ago, when he was a poor man like you an' me, and Mrs Tregenna cleaned her own doorstep. Some folks has all the luck!"

It was time to ring the bells, and the cronies separated—Ben Rowe to attend to his duties, and Giles to wait on the wall till his "missis" came to church rigged in her Sunday best.

A sprinkling of villagers began to straggle up the hill presently, and as the bell stopped the few local gentry appeared—Colonel Carew and Marion, the Garths, the family from the Vicarage, and Adolphus Wetherby, a young fellow who kept the small preparatory school, founded by his father, in which St John Garth had been assisting while he read for the Church.

Mrs Garth walked last. She found the hill fatiguing, and leaned rather heavily on Stephen's arm. His face was pale and drawn this morning, his eyes sunken, his features rigid. He stared straight ahead, seeming lost in an evil dream, as though the shadows of the night lingered with him still.

"Where is Marian?" asked his mother. "He is not with the Colonel and Marion."

"Perhaps he has already gone in," said Garth. "Or perhaps," he added, with a half smile, "the young gentleman is breakfasting in bed this morning!"

His tone seemed to make an unfavourable impression on Mrs Garth.

"I hope you go to church when you are in London, Stephen?" she asked. "I don't like young men to grow lax."

"I am afraid I haven't the time to think about church, mother," he replied. "Unfortunately, the irreligious public insists on being ill on Sunday as much as on other days, and a doctor must study his patients before everything else."

"Even before the welfare of his own soul?" asked Mrs Garth in a low, troubled tone.

"My dear mother," he said, "I am not going to enter into a theological discussion with you, because I am sure you would not leave me a leg to stand upon! I think religious observances are more necessary to some temperaments than to others, and that if a man does his duty to the best of his ability he is on the safe side of the hedge."

"That is the agnostic argument," said Mrs Garth. "I hope, oh, I hope you are not agnostic, Stephen!"

"Should I be going to church with you if I were?" he queried rather wearily. "Don't worry about me, mother. Is it not much more sensible to interest oneself in the welfare of this world, while one is here, than to be always preparing for the next? To save a man's life, or alleviate the sufferings of a woman or a child, makes me feel more 'good,' I can assure you, than a week of prayer meetings. Is that John Tregenna over there? He looks very smart."

A big, thick-set man of about thirty-five had just entered the churchyard briskly. His clothes were good and new, but the

wearer did not look as much like a gentleman as a prosperous farmer, or something of that sort, aping the gentleman, and less accustomed to broadcloth than to homespun.

"He is getting up in the world," said Mrs Garth. "Some people prophesy that he will be one of the richest men in this part of the county some day. He seems to have a special gift for hard work and money-making. Did Rachel tell you he had given her ten pounds for poor Mrs Penrose, whose husband was drowned last week? I think he likes coming to see us. He has dropped in several times lately on some pretext or other."

"Queer company, mother."

"Of course, he is not a gentleman," said Mrs Garth, "and never will be; but he is a very honest and upright man, and one cannot be rude to him. It seems to me rather a refined trait in him that he should wish to mix with educated people. I wonder what brings him over to Carnruan church this morning?"

Garth volunteered no conjecture on the subject, which did not interest him. His attention had wandered many times, and it was only by an effort that he had been able to return intelligent replies. Throughout the night he had been the prey to emotions which he could not confess to a living soul. That moonlight scene by the Rocking Stone, his father's figure, the shriek like ice water upon his burning passion, the hands which clung and slipped away from life! He wanted to leave off thinking about it; there are things which a sane man *must* forget. But it came back and back to haunt him, and the scream of a gull, circling slowly above the tower, was a hideous reminder of the tragedy. Still, he had not laid hands upon his father. How many times during the night had he not soothed himself with that phrase? Nobody could call it murder. An "accident" had happened. No doubt he had facilitated it by stepping aside, but he had done so to avoid a blow; and what man, irritated to boiling point, would have stopped at such a moment to protect his adversary? His chief cause for self-reproach was his delay in proffering aid. But that was not murder; he was not a parricide because he had hesitated a little too long.

It was easy to find arguments in his own favour, not as easy to be convinced by them. His conscience was on the rack, and

his mental agony complicated by the fear that the body would be found and the identity of the drunken rogue revealed. If only the sea would keep it! Evidently Vivian Carew had only known him by an alias, or revelations would have occurred before. Inquiry in the village would have eased Garth's mind on that score, but he dared not inquire; he dared not show any knowledge of the old man's visit to Carnruan, much less any interest in it. Whatever came out his lips must be locked for ever upon the secret of the night.

And still it was unreal to him, as such a tragedy must always seem in the course of prosaic, everyday events. There were moments, and this was one of them, when the familiar environment deadened if it did not pacify his outraged nerves: the old church tower, the long, dank grass, the slate tombs driven inward by the force of many gales, the brooding grey note of land and sea and sky. He could recall innumerable Sunday mornings such as this, beginning with the breakfast-table at The Haven, the sound of the Sabbath bells, and his walk to church, with his mother leaning on his arm. Was last night possible, or had he dreamt it after all?

He removed his hat mechanically in the porch, beside the tablet relating to Jabez Couche, mariner, and his quaint bequest, and led Mrs Garth to their accustomed place. It was all the same as usual; he knew every stone of the old church, with its long, dim, narrow nave, and small, sunken windows, and choir screen of black, mouldering oak. In the north transept was a Roman milestone, which had been discovered in the neighbourhood a few years ago by a noted antiquary who was visiting the Colonel, and the tomb of a Crusader reclined in a niche facing it. His brother St John used to sing in the choir as a boy; and the one pane of modern glass in the church reminded Stephen of a peccadillo of his youth which had ended in tears of repentance and the sacrifice of his money-box. He knew every face and voice in the congregation. Even the Sunday bonnets of the village women and the coats of the men were old friends to him. There was no stranger here, unless it were himself.

He leaned back with folded arms, his mind far away. His mood was not soft and emotional; on the contrary, his anxiety

made him hard. He felt in some sort the victim of circumstances. The awful thing which had happened had been forced upon him; he had not sought it. The chain of coincidences which had brought him and his father to Carnruan at the same time, to that very spot on the cliff at the same hour, seemed more than chance. What was to be the end of it? Was his father to be foisted upon him in death, were his efforts to raise himself and those dependent upon him to meet with such a reward, or would the whole thing blow over peacefully?

"When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness which he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive."

The old Vicar's slow and droning voice came to a halt, and a stir ran through the rustic congregation. A coastguard was making his way up the nave with an official air. He touched the doctor on the shoulder.

Garth started out of his reverie.

"What is the matter?" he asked huskily.

The coastguard whispered, and Garth rose to leave the church. St John questioned him with his eyes, but he did not respond or notice his mother and sisters; he did not even glance at Marion, who was sitting close by. Outside, his stiff lips moved at last.

"...nen was the body found?"

"Half-an-hour ago, sir; just down under the Logan Stone. My mate Wilson was going round there with a boat, and see something sticking out of the water close to the shore."

"A stranger, you say?" added Garth, his voice growing harder and clearer. "Do you mean a sailor washed ashore from some wreck?"

"No, sir; a man of the name of Joe Williams, who said he came from London, and was hanging round the village last night. Mr Vivian Carew knows him."

"Ah," said Garth, "a man of the name of Williams!" He drew a deep breath of relief. "Have you taken him to the inn?"

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry to bring you out o' church, but a Dr Macdonald is over at th' Island, we didn't know what else to do."

"It is aill right, my man," said Garth.

They walked quickly and silently down the hill. Garth's teeth

were clenched, and every nerve and muscle in him braced. He had not anticipated that the body would be found so soon, if at all, still less that he would be called upon to testify the death. But what was more natural? The corpse had become jammed among the rocks, and exposed to view at the first low tide, and the local doctor was away.

One of the local policemen was at the inn, and the Inspector from Craddoc, who happened to be over at Carnruan; also Mr Pennyquick, the landlord, and three or four other village lights. There was no crowd, because most of the inhabitants were at church.

The Inspector saluted Dr Garth—they were old acquaintances—and led the way to the parlour where Vivian Carew and "Joe Williams" had wrangled last night. The same stuffy atmosphere, reminiscent of beer and stale tobacco, greeted Garth which had greeted Vivian; and what the sea had given up lay on the table where the dead wretch had spilled the liquor which had cost him his life.

Stephen Garth approached, and stood beside his father's body. His temples were throbbing, but outwardly he was calm, and applied the usual tests without delay. The sense of unreality which had attacked him before returned, producing something like indifference, and he wondered at his own self-control and at the coolness and resonance of his own voice.

"Life has been extinct for some hours."

"And the cause of death?" asked the Inspector, making notes in a pocket-book. "Was he dead before he entered the water?"

"I can't say," said Garth musingly. "It is probable."

The rocks had been cruel indeed. There were many injuries to the head and face, which was more repulsive than ever to look upon.

"He must have fallen off the cliffs," said the Inspector; "unless," he added in a lower tone, "somebody pitched him on!" Garth did not hear the last sentence. He had retired to Mr Pennyquick's parlour to write out the certificate of death.

As he left the inn a moment later he found the coastguard who had fetched him looking through a telescope.

"There's a boat coming in from the Island, sir."

"Is there?" said Garth, pausing. "I should like to hear how Dr Macdonald is getting on."

He walked down to the Cove with the coastguard, glad of distraction, and was on the spot when the boat stopped within hailing distance.

One of the men stood up in the bow. He was a fisherman, in jersey and sea-boots, a big, sturdy fellow who had escaped contagion so far.

"Is Dr Garth at Carnruan?"

"Yes," said Garth, stepping forward. "I am he."

"The old doctor is down with the small-pox and wants to know if you'll come over and 'elp, sir?"

"Is Dr Macdonald very ill?"

"He sez he's dying. We're in an awful state."

"I'll be ready in fifteen minutes. Wait for me."

Garth turned and walked rapidly back to the village, the old nightmare obliterated by the new. There was work to be done. His fellow-creatures needed him. This was no time in which to think of his own concerns, however weighty they might be. The mission of the doctor to the suffering and the dying called him forth with the trumpet note which always fired his blood. The son who had allowed his father to perish was sunk in the physician, prompt, courageous, devoted, willing to give his life, if need be, for duty's sake.

He went to Macdonald's house for certain medicines and instruments—fortunately, the old Scotsman was a bachelor, and there were no anxious women to whom the bad news must be told; thence home, where he dashed off a note of explanation for his mother, and flung a few clothes into a bag. The people were coming out of church as he left the house, and he met Marion on his way back to the landing-place.

"I came out first," she said, "in order to discover what had become of you. Is anything the matter?"

"A body was found on the shore," he said, "and there is bad news from the Island. Poor old Macdonald has caught the small-pox, and has sent for me, knowing, I suppose, that I was expected down. I am glad to see you before I go, Marion."

"You are going over to the Island!" she exclaimed, turning pale. "What, now—at once?"

"Yes. The boat is waiting. Walk down to the Cove with me."

"Oh, I wish—I wish——" she murmured, and broke off. Her eyes rested on him with an expression of anguish; she slipped her hand through his arm. "It is very dangerous, is it not?"

"A doctor faces such dangers constantly."

"But small-pox," she said, shuddering, "such an infectious and such a loathsome disease! If he has caught it, poor old fellow, you may catch it too. And there is no one to help you. You will be all alone. You are walking into a death-trap, Stephen!"

"What would you have me do—refuse to go?" he asked.

"N-no," she said. "But it seems hard, so hard that it should come just now. We have not had even one day together. My heart fails me. . . ." Her lips trembled, and she pressed his arm convulsively. "Take me with you, Stephen! I am a good nurse, and I should be able to help those poor creatures. I would be no trouble to you; I am sure you would find me useful."

"Good God, Marion, how can you propose such a thing! Is it likely that I should consent to it?"

"I am not a bit nervous—about myself," she added, "and I should feel so much easier if I were with you."

He looked at her with adoration.

"O Marion, what have I done to deserve such a love?"

"You will take me?"

"No—no—no! What would the Colonel say? What would Vivian say? What would all your friends say? You would add to my anxiety a thousandfold. It is too preposterous to be discussed. Remain at home, my dearest, and guard your precious life—for me. I shall return in safety, you may be sure."

Her eyes swam in tears she would not allow to fall.

"I shall pray for you," she said.

"Yes; pray for me—and write. The boat goes over every day. I shall not write to you, but I will send messages."

"If I had not come out of church early you would not even have said good-bye to me!"

"There was no time to seek you," he said. "Every moment is precious; an hour's delay might cost a life."

"The doctor first, the lover second, eh, Stephen?"

"My heart is divided," he said. "Half is for humanity and half for you. But they are crying to me for help, those women and children over there. Are you angry with me?"

"Angry!" she repeated, and her voice melted in an exquisitely tender and melodious cadence. "I love and admire you more than I can say."

They had reached the Cove by this time, and Garth motioned to the boat, which was rocking just beyond the broken water, to come in and fetch him. She drew still closer to his side. Her eyes were hungry for him, fearing that they might never rest on his face again.

"Go, dear," he said gently. "These men come from an area of infection. There is no need for you to run any risk."

"Yes; you are afraid that a tainted breath may reach me," she said passionately, "and yet you are going into the very midst of disease and death yourself!"

"My dear," he said, half smiling, "you will never do for a doctor's wife."

"Don't say that, Stephen. This is an unusually trying occasion, which can never—surely never come again. But you shall not think me a coward! Good-bye."

"I may kiss you before the men?"

"Before the world," she said, holding up her lips. "God guard you, dear."

He dropped her hands and sprang into the boat. The Carnruan men had withdrawn to a distance, and the Islanders pushed off alone. Marion still lingered on the strip of sand, gazing after him, a graceful figure against the rugged cliff, with her pure, grave face in its frame of fair hair.

He was flushed, exalted. After all, it was a sacrifice that he was making. He had not been conscious of it before; it was so natural, so inevitable that he should go. But it was sweet to be told by the eyes of the woman he loved that he was a hero; to be reminded by the thrill in her voice, and her nervous, clinging hands, how much he was risking for duty's sake. They were

thoughts to fire a man's blood, to bring out the best that was in him, to give him the impulse to be as worthy as flesh could be of the pedestal on which she placed him.

Over the water from the church on the cliff was suddenly wafted the sound of a bell—a deep-toned, solemn bell mourning for the dead.

"To the memory of every drowned seaman and other person whose bodye be found on Carnruan Strand. . . ."

An icy chill ran through Garth's hot veins, the light died out of his eyes. He turned away from Marion, and bowed his head as a man who shrinks from a blow, and covered his ears with his hands.

CHAPTER V

THE TREGENNAS

MRS TREGENNA opened the oven door with a dish-cloth, and turned the tin of baked potatoes.

"You always let them get too brown, Emma," she said fretfully, "and you know how the master hates 'em 'ard. It's time you put the sauce on."

She sat down on one of the hard wooden chairs as she finished speaking, and wiped her face. She was the type of woman which only seems to keep servants in order to make more work for herself by looking after them. John Tregenna had kept three maids, and a man for the horse, since he built himself a bigger house, the year before last, and began to be spoken of as a rich man; but his wife Prudence still rose at five in the summer and six in the winter to get the maids "up and doing," and to be "up and doing" herself. Every tin and copper pan in the kitchen was polished to the brightness of glass; every room in the house was being perpetually dusted, scrubbed, and swept; scarcely a cup of tea was swallowed by her lord and master of which Mrs Tregenna had not superintended the preparation herself. John was particular, and liked things nice about him; and servants were all fools, who could not cook an egg properly, and would forget their heads if they were loose.

She was a small woman, with a flat figure and a bleached face.

As a girl she had been plump and pretty, but in her thirty-seventh year she was as hopelessly middle-aged as only a woman of the people can become on the right side of forty. Her fair hair, which had been almost golden when John Tregenna courted her, had faded to drab ; her eyes were no longer blue ; her lips and cheeks were colourless, and the skin had puckered itself into the innumerable lines and creases which years so swiftly bring to the uneducated face. At twenty-five she had been fond of ribbons, and still liked to be reminded of the time when she was known for the smartest girl in Carnruan, whence she came. But John Tregenna had been only a poor man then, with a dogged determination to rise, and he had impressed upon Prudence the necessity of being careful with the money which was so hard to earn. So she had given up thinking about pretty clothes, and set herself to screw and slave at home, to help her husband to save the first five hundred pounds, which is the most difficult of all to save. And when the five hundred pounds was saved he had been equally anxious to make it a thousand, and she had continued her painful economies. So by the time they were well off her hands were chapped and her face worn, and the belle of Carnruan had lost the art of being young and attracting her husband and taking life easily. She no longer had any idea of making the best of herself ; she had given up caring about dress, and thought any sort of ill-fitting black garment good enough. All her care and attention was bestowed upon her furniture—John's meals, and if the pie crust were underdone, or she discovered a scratch on the drawing-room furniture, she fretted for a day over it. Her mouth drooped, because such trifles were really troubles to her. She could not help worrying and harassing the flesh off her bones. Circumstances, grafted upon predisposition, had made her what she was. Withal it was a pathetic figure which Prudence Tregenna presented to the thoughtful gaze, for she had given up the best part of her life for a man who did not even notice the sacrifice.

She rose presently. It was ten minutes to seven, and Tregenna always came home from the mine at seven, with the appetite for a substantial supper to be expected of his burly frame. He worked hard, and was fond of good food now he could afford it,

and a sirloin of beef was roasting on the spit in front of the open grate.

There was scarcely time to go up and change her dress—John was always punctual; besides, it did not seem worth while. John liked her to smarten herself up for supper, because he had begun to feel as though they were gentry now he was getting rich. But she was weary, and disinclined to trouble; and after all he scarcely looked at her when he came in, and buried himself in the newspaper directly after supper. It was well enough for young girls, with nothing else to think about, to bother about their clothes; her fortune was made.

She washed her hands at the sink in the scullery with a piece of yellow soap, and dried them on the jack towel. Then she went to the dining-room to see how the supper-table looked, and fidgeted about, smoothing a crease out of the cloth here, straightening a spoon there, folding *The Western Morning News* just as Tregenna liked it folded. Even now she could not sit down, although her limbs ached. Monday was the drawing-room "day," and she had been brushing and polishing every article after the servants until she was irritable with fatigue.

The dining-room was what John Tregenna considered handsome; everything had come from Plymouth not more than two years ago, and was still as good as new. There was crimson flock paper on the wall; a slate clock of the largest size on the mantelpiece, flanked by the "Marly Horses" in metal which Tregenna called bronze; a handsome patterned carpet, and a substantial suite of furniture covered with maroon velvet. But what were dearest of all to Prudence Tregenna's heart were the pictures, which had been her choice. There were a dozen of them—large oleographs in the most speckless and expensive English gilt frames—representing "The Huguenot's Farewell," and similar dramatic subjects: works of art, at which she gazed with fond pride whenever she dusted them.

At seven minutes to seven John Tregenna's latch-key turned in the front door, and she heard him wipe his heavy boots on the mat. He put his head round the sitting-room door. He was in his mining clothes, and not fit to be seen, and with a grunt to his wife by way of greeting he tramped upstairs.

As the clock struck he was down again, in a clean suit, his florid face shining with soap, and his thick, towlike hair oiled and brushed into some sort of order.

The beef was already on the table, and he began to carve without more ado.

"What about the inquest at Carnruan?" he inquired. "Have you heard anything?"

"James Permewan's been over," she said, "and Mrs Permewan looked in this afternoon. There's an awful to-do. What do you think? Mr Carew's been arrested!"

"Arrested?" repeated Tregenna. "Mr Vivian Carew of Poldinnick, do you mean?"

"Yes; the Colonel's son, sure enough. I could hardly believe it. He's been mixed up in some way with this Joe Williams, it seems. Mr Pennyquick 'eard them quarrellin' in his parlour on Saturday night. He says he opened the door, fearin' they would come to blows, and afterwards he 'eard 'em making an appointment to meet that night at the Logan Stone, where Mr Vivian was to bring Williams fifty pounds. It was at the foot of the cliff by the Logan Stone that the corpse was found. There's a lot more come out, which Mrs Permewan couldn't tell plain; but it seems they've put two and two together, and don't believe Williams came to his death natural, and the jury's brought in a verdict of wilful murder against Mr Vivian Carew."

"Lord!" said Tregenna. He dropped his knife and fork; his eyes seemed starting out of his head; he gaped, and only closed his mouth to emit a prolonged whistle. "Are you sure," he added, "that you've got the right end of the story? You ain't over-bright, you know."

"I've only told you what Mrs Permewan told *me*," said Prudence without resentment. "What a state the Colonel must be in! I can't believe the lad's done anything wrong, can you? And him a gentleman born and bred!"

Tregenna did not reply. He was always a practical man, and the supper was on the table. He resumed his grasp of his knife and fork, and went on eating, while Prudence dilated upon the news. Horrors had the morbid fascination for her common to her kind, and on this theme her imagination was almost vivid,

although it slumbered at other times. She wondered aloud whether there had been much of a struggle before the old man went, or if he had only had a push in the dark.

Tregenna paid no attention whatever to her comments and questions, but finished his beef, and pushed away his plate.

"I won't have any pudding," he said. "I want my boots. I'm going out."

"It's a marmalade pudding; your favourite," said Prudence. "You'd better 'ave a bit."

"I've had enough," he said, "and I'm in a hurry."

"It seems to me you've taken to going out every night," said his wife, in a low tone.

"Well, what do you expect?" he asked with brutal raillery. "You may be a very good cook, my dear, but as an ornament to sit and stare at all the evening you're enough to give a fellow the blooming hump!"

He laughed, and the woman's face flushed, and her colourless eyes were moist as he left the room. He was profoundly indifferent. She had become a mere chattel to him years ago. She minded his interests, and looked after his personal comforts, and he talked to her as much or as little as it pleased him. He kept her as he would have kept a faithful watch-dog, in fact, only he would have taken more notice of the dog.

He put on his overcoat in the hall, drew a cap over his ears, and went out, banging the door after him. The house was just outside the bare and ugly village, the population of which consisted almost entirely of miners, most of whom were employed by "Th' Talk o' the Vale." Tregenna was master here, a personage of importance, upon whom the daily bread depended, and the few people he encountered saluted him respectfully. He took no more notice of them, however, than he had taken of his wife, but struck out for Carnruan by the short cut through the fields.

As it happened, the news of Vivian Carew's arrest was more of a thunderclap to him than to anyone, for he was in a position to know that the young man had had nothing to do with Joe Williams' death. By chance he also had been prowling in the moonlight on that eventful Saturday night, and from the distance

had witnessed the encounter of Stephen Garth and Joe Williams and its termination. A cautious man, not likely to interfere profitlessly with what did not concern him, he would have held his tongue even without a special inducement to do so, and the special inducement existed in the person of Rachel Garth. A profound admiration for the girl had taken possession of Mr Tregenna's soul some time ago. It had grown upon him until the sight of her made the big man flush and tremble in his boots. It was her face which inspired his sudden generosity towards the poor of Carnruan; it was she whom he came to see when he found an excuse to call at The Haven; it was to her, in reality, that his occasional offerings of fruit and game were sent. Stephen Garth was her brother, and if he chose to hold his tongue about the man on the cliff it was his own affair.

But the arrest of Vivian Carew put a different complexion upon matters. John Tregenna did not pose as a philanthropist, neither was he a particularly soft-hearted nor conscientious man, but he felt that it was time he had a talk with Dr Stephen Garth.

He did not mean to make it at all unpleasant. He was quite willing to believe anything reasonable that Rachel Garth's brother chose to tell him, and to bear witness to it in court if need be, only young Carew must be pulled out of the hole he was in. He had always liked Vivian, who had never put on as many airs as other young gentlemen in the county when talking to the self-made man.

It will be seen that so far John Tregenna's intentions were most exemplary, and that he could afford to smoke the pipe of peace as he strode along. But when he reached Carnruan and inquired for Dr Garth at The Haven his plans were upset by finding that the doctor was away.

"I wanted to see him particularly," said Tregenna, frowning in perplexity, and biting his bushy red-brown moustache. Then his countenance lightened; after all, he might make something out of his disappointment. "Will you ask Miss Rachel if I can see her instead—on a matter of business?"

The servant showed him into the dining-room, which was empty, and a moment afterwards Rachel entered.

"Good-evening, Mr Tregenna. You wish to see my brother, I understand?"

"Yes," he said; "it's awkward he's away."

The man held the girl's slim hand closely in his big one.

"Won't you sit down?" she said. "Perhaps I can take Stephen's place?"

"Scarcely," he replied. "But I thought you might be able to tell me when he was coming back."

"I am afraid I cannot do that; I wish I could. I shall be writing to him. Is there anything I can say for you?"

"I don't know that there is," he said slowly. "I wanted to talk to him on a private matter, which he wouldn't wish even his sister to hear about."

"I didn't think Stephen had any secrets!" she said.

He leaned nearer to her over the corner of the table. It was not often they were alone together, and he lost his head a little. Hitherto he had held himself with a very tight hand in her presence, but it seemed to him that he had never seen her looking prettier than she looked to-night, and the sudden realisation of power quickened the beating of his heart and thickened his voice. A great deal more depended upon his friendship than she knew.

"You can't be sure of anybody. You're fond of him, aren't you, and would be grateful to anyone who did him a good turn?"

"Yes; certainly," she said.

"What would you do for anyone who—who was his friend in need?"

He was gazing at her with an intentness which magnetised her, and the girl gazed back at him, conscious of a tension, waiting for something she could not name.

"It would depend," she said slowly, "upon whom the 'anyone' was and upon what he—or she—did for Stephen."

"What would you do for me?"

Rachel hesitated, perplexed.

"How could I do anything for you, Mr Tregenna? You are a rich man."

"There are things which a man wants besides money," he

said huskily; "things which even money can't buy—friendship, for instance."

"We are friends already, are we not?"

"Are we?" he asked. "Are we real friends, or do you only tolerate the self-made man out of civility? I want to know—Rachel."

As he spoke he pressed her arm, which was resting on the table, and the expression of his eyes brought the blood to her face. She had known that he admired her, but he had never looked at her like that before, certainly never dared to touch her. So that was the reason he had taken to calling at The Haven! Her heart beat fast. If he had been single she would have been only sorry for him; he was married, so she was angry and frightened as well. She could not believe he meant to be impertinent. Was it possible he had been drinking? Anyhow, he must be checked.

Her lips were trembling. She was young and inexperienced, but she had plenty of courage. She looked him straight in the face, and rose to terminate the interview.

"I am sorry Stephen is away, Mr Tregenna. Perhaps you would like to write to him yourself or to see my brother St John instead?"

She ignored his question utterly. He was treated like a child who did not know how to behave. A dull flush of rage rose to the man's cheeks.

"It isn't necessary," he said sullenly. "I can wait a bit, thank you. Sorry to have troubled you, I'm sure."

She bowed, without offering to shake hands again, and Tregenna picked up his hat and went out with a stormy countenance. He was not only furious; he was wounded to the quick. He had betrayed his passion to this girl, and she had put him in his place. Only one thing could have added to his humiliation—a witness to it. Even as it was he felt for the moment as though he would never forgive her. Was he a dog that his touch should be regarded as contamination?

He no longer cared about Vivian Carew, and right and wrong, abstract or otherwise. The girl's scorn had turned the man's feeble good intentions to evil. He stopped to light his pipe, and

looked back at the house with a grim smile. Power was a pleasant thing to possess. It was a pity to give away what might be useful some day.

CHAPTER VI

A MAN AND HIS SOUL

STEPHEN GARTH reached the Island just in time to soothe the death-bed of his old friend, and take up the burden of his labours.

In some ways the hard work and anxiety he found here were a blessing to him. The needs of the present were so pressing that he could not afford to sit still and torment himself over the past. He threw all his heart and soul into the task of fighting the dread disease which met him everywhere within the cramped limits of the Island. The people, ignorant, and panic-stricken as their betters might have been, gave him little or no assistance. In the beginning they had raved like wolves caged within sight of fire, and would have flung themselves upon the mainland, carrying contagion over the length and breadth of England, if their Cornish brothers had not forbidden them to set foot ashore with weapons more forcible than words. Denied escape they had turned sullen, and Garth had his work cut out to manage them. He bullied, argued, cajoled. He called them fools and knaves who were not worth saving, and worked twenty hours out of the twenty-four for them. He was doctor, nurse, and cook in one. Macdonald had been old, if willing; this man was young; the fire of intellect blazed in his eyes; his voice rang with that note of command to which the masses bow unconsciously; above all, he was always cheery and hopeful, even when things were at their worst. These people began to worship him. They awoke from their stupefaction of terror and followed him about like dogs. His slightest word was law. They vied with each other for a look from him; the women touched him as he passed; the children struggled for possession of his hand. The Vicar, his one educated help, fell ill, and Garth read the burial services himself. He did everything, and would have done more if physical

limitations had not stopped him. When outraged nature would have its way, and sleep overcame him despite himself, he felt like a renegade. Those wretched creatures had no one else.

At the end of a fortnight his work began to show. By this time he had vaccinated every man, woman, and child who had escaped infection, and had contrived, by the aid of such small public buildings as there were, to put a stop to the dangerous herding in one room, or one small cottage with two rooms, and had found means of isolating his patients. The abundance of fresh air was in his favour, and the splendid physique of the people themselves: they were sons of Anak, and the children were like little cherubs—blonde, chubby, robust.

The epidemic was abating, but it would be a long time before he would be able to give the Island a clean bill of health and permit promiscuous intercourse with the mainland to be resumed.

He had done something that was worth doing—something which soothed his restless, unhappy conscience. His father's death would always be a rankling wound; he would never be able to exonerate himself utterly for his share in it; but if that one soul could complain of him, how many others would have reason to speak of him as benefactor, saviour!

He was snatching a brief hour's rest one afternoon when the mail came. For two days a storm had completely cut them off from the outer world, and he was naturally eager to hear from Marion. There were two letters beside hers, which he reserved for the last. He opened the one in Rachel's writing first.

The light of pleasant expectation suddenly died from his face.

"... I do not know how to break the fearful news to you. You will be as shocked, I am sure, as any of us. Vivian Carew has been committed for trial on the charge of murdering some man called Joe Williams, who was down here pestering him for money. I told you nothing about the arrest, as we hoped that the magistrate would dismiss the charge, and I did not want to pain you needlessly in the midst of your hard and dangerous toil. But now one can no longer doubt the seriousness of his position, and I know you would not like it to be kept from you. The poor Colonel is half distracted with grief, as are all of us. It is

impossible, impossible that he can be guilty! . . . I have not the heart to write any more."

The sheet of notepaper rustled in Garth's hands.

"My God, what a fatality!" he whispered.

He was too shocked and bewildered to collect his thoughts at first. His brain swam; he leaned his head on his hands.

This unexpected news altered everything. To remain silent regarding his father's death had been a matter of mere prudence and common-sense; Vivian's arrest made it a crime. Of course, he could not allow his friend to suffer unjustly. He would have to come forward and explain everything. It might not be necessary to reveal the identity of Joe Williams. It might be sufficient to say that a man, whom he had taken for a drunken tramp, had attacked him on the cliff and met his death by accident.

He opened the second letter mechanically. The contents were almost as startling in another way as the first. The story of his fight with the small-pox fiend was all over England, it seemed. The newspapers had got hold of it, and chosen to make a romance out of the "talented young physician" who had left his betrothed on the first day of their engagement for duty's sake. The public was making a hero of him, and a well-known philanthropist had written offering him the wherewithal to start a practice in Harley Street.

Despite the plight in which this recognition found him Garth could not restrain the throb of pride and pleasure which a man must feel who finds his secret good deeds acclaimed. To start as a consulting physician in Harley Street, too, was the goal he had had in view for years. With Marion's money he could do so at any time, it is true, but he would not touch Marion's money. If this man cared to make the necessary advance on a business basis there was no reason why he should not accept it, unless—unless he were led into trouble by Vivian's arrest.

Marion's letter was left. He was almost afraid of it. She spoke of Vivian, of course, and then followed a burst of praise for him—a woman's eulogy of the man she loved.

"You do not know how much I think of you," she wrote, "and how I thank God for you every day. Perhaps you imagine I do not know what you are doing; but I go down to the Cove when

the boat comes in, and the men tell me everything they have heard. You are a hero, and you are mine. Oh, may you come back safely to me, my love, my love!"

The three letters lay on the table side by side. He smeared his forehead, which was wet. If he remained silent about Vivian a brilliant future was assured to him.

But she called him her hero, and the man was his friend!

"Yes," he decided; "I will go back and speak."

He allowed his resolution no time to cool. He made instant arrangements to leave the Island. As soon as he reached the mainland he would telegraph right and left for a substitute, who should not be difficult to find, and if he were able he would return himself in the course of a day or two.

But his intention of "righting" Vivian was not to be so easily carried out. Directly it was known that he contemplated going away a deputation of Islanders waited on him in the cottage where he lodged. The spokesman, cap in hand, was respectful, but determined.

"We hear you're goin' to leave us, sir, and hope as 'ow it's a mistake?"

"No; it is not a mistake," said Garth. "Unfortunately, I must go, my man. I have important business ashore—business which won't wait."

"But our women and children want you here, sir. There's many lives dependin' on you."

"Another doctor will come and take my place."

"I venture to say, on behalf o' my mates, that *nobody* could take your place, Dr Garth," said the spokesman. "There ain't another doctor in England what would 'a' done for us what you've done, and we can't spare you yet."

"God knows," said Garth earnestly, "that I don't want to leave you till you are out of the wood, my man, but a duty as imperative calls me ashore."

"You can't be wanted over there as badly as we want you, sir. Indeed, we can't let you go."

"Suppose I say that I'll return in a day or two—if possible?" suggested Garth.

"If you was to promise, we'd rely on your word, sir."

"I fear I cannot promise," said Garth, troubled. "Circumstances beyond my control might detain me."

"But you'd come back if you could, sir, and you'd be willing to stay if you could?"

"Certainly."

The fisherman turned to the eager, clustering faces in the doorway.

"You hear what he's got to say, lads; he's goin' again' his will. What do *we* say?"

"We won't let 'im go," said another big fellow, coming forward. "Somebody else 'll have to wait."

Garth, who had been scribbling down last instructions for his chief nurse—a bright, intelligent fisher girl, who had been a god-send to him—looked up with a start. The sturdy figures in the doorway, the anxious, weather-beaten faces, struck an impressive note suddenly in his mind. He put down his pen and looked at them all.

"Do you mean," he said quietly, "that I am a prisoner?"

"Lord, don't call it that, sir, after all you've done for us!"

"But the fact remains that you would prevent my leaving the Island by force?"

"Well, ye see, sir," said a hoarse voice reluctantly, "it's our lives and the lives of our wives and children that's at stake."

"Then if I must remain, I must," said Garth, resting his elbow on the table and screening his eyes with his hand. "You may go."

The men exchanged glances and withdrew. Only one lingered, the original spokesman of the party.

"We 'ope you're not angry with us, sir?"

"Angry? No," said Garth. "It is very natural. I daresay I should do the same in your place."

When he was alone his hand dropped, and the mask of reluctance with it. His expression was one of intense relief. A load had been raised from his mind. He had intended to confess at once, but if these men restrained him by force it was not his fault. It was a respite which was offered to him. The matter of his father's death must stand over for a week or two. Meanwhile Vivian might be able to prove his innocence, and the necessity for speaking might be obviated altogether.

Garth expelled a deep, quivering breath, and threw the whole thing off for the time. It was almost happiness to be able to forget in work again. Nevertheless, he went down to the shore to meet the boat from Carnruan next evening. If only he could learn that Vivian was safe he would be able to let the ghastly episode lie for ever in oblivion. Surely it was not too much to expect an innocent man to be acquitted? He prayed for news and for good news as he walked up and down the strip of sand watching for the boat to loom out of the light sea-mist.

When it came at last he could not wait for it to be beached, but shouted to the men eagerly :

"Is there any news about Mr Vivian Carew?"

"Yes, sir. The trial came on over at Bodmin to-day."

"And the verdict?"

The answer swept faintly across the water mingled with the closer sound of the surf.

"Guilty. He's got penal servitude for life."

A strong shudder shook Garth. He dared not believe his ears.

"Penal servitude! Are you sure—quite sure?"

"There ain't no mistake. The telegram came at five o'clock, just afore I left, and th' postmaster read it out from th' doorstep."

Garth took his letters and went away with them. There was only one from Carnruan—from his mother. Rachel and Marion had gone over to Bodmin with the Colonel, she told him, writing before the bad news came, and they were all very anxious.

He did not go back to his cottage; he sought fresh air and solitude, as he had sought it that fatal Saturday night, but with what different emotions! An open door had suddenly slammed in his face. His hope that Vivian would escape without his intervention was destroyed for ever. Something strenuous must be done now; no half-hearted, semi-private confession could release the man who had been convicted of murder. He would have to explain why he had not mentioned the "tramp's" death at the time; why he had pretended the man was unknown to him when he gave the certificate of death; why, above all, he had remained silent when his friend was accused of murder. To say he did not speak before because the fishermen would not let him leave the Island was an excuse only good enough for

himself; it would not be accepted by the world. He might have written, sent a message at the least. Good God! if he had been really in earnest he would have shouted the truth to the winds of heaven a week ago! But he had gone on shirking confession, and hoping it would never be necessary. He had behaved like a coward, and every day of silence which he had allowed to elapse made the task of confession more difficult.

While the twilight gave way to night, and the stars came out, he paced along the shore over rock and sand, unconscious of fatigue, as he battled with this problem which fate had given to his soul. Looking back he could not understand why he had not told the truth at the beginning. It was the silence which would damn him. People would think rightly that he had held his tongue because he was afraid, and then, of course, they would begin to wonder *why* he was afraid. His story, so long withheld, of the drunken stranger — who had attacked a man younger and stronger than himself, and fallen over the cliffs without being touched, would be taken sceptically; investigations would lead to the discovery of his relationship to "Joe Williams," and he would be accused perhaps of murdering the disreputable father he had had so much reason to wish out of the way. God knew where it would end. And it was not alone he who would suffer by his disgrace; his mother, his sisters, his brother, Marion, would suffer. His career would be blighted at the outset—his career, which he had dedicated to promoting the welfare of the human race. And he had done nothing; after all, it was Vivian's fault that old Garth had come to Carnruan. If Vivian had kept straight, this encounter, which had led to such fatal results, would never have taken place. The young fellow's own folly and viciousness had brought the storm down upon his head.

A sense of gross injustice grew in Garth's breast. His impulse of generosity had cooled. To give himself in Vivian's place would be to waste his intellect, the ripe result of his long, arduous years of study and preparation, to throw him back, perhaps for ever, and deprive humanity of a man who meant to devote his life to its service. In return he would restore to society an idler who did nothing but spend the money he had not earned; a man who had already begun to show signs of weakness and self-

indulgence, if not of vice. Vivian's life was worthless except to the one or two people who loved him, his own was valuable. It was nothing less than an economic crime he contemplated.

Without being conscious how he came there Garth awoke, as from a delirium, to find himself standing upon a promontory in the midst of the sea. The ridge of the rock which he had traversed lay behind him in the night, one solitary black thread connecting him with life; at his feet the surf boiled and bubbled into foam, and shot up hissing between the splintered rock to bedew his face with spray; a revolving light flashed across from the mainland—the light which had seen his father's death. It seemed watching him to-night like an eye which never slept—watching and waiting—and the same quiet stars blinked overhead.

The man's solitary figure might have been part of the rock itself as he stood tense, with folded arms, in the teeth of wind and wave. Flecks of spume clung to his clothes, his lips were wet with salt; an encroaching wave drenched him to the knees. It was the crisis of his life, and he knew it suddenly. His sensations were curious. He was no longer deeply agitated as he had been at first. A sort of tranquillity—the stillness of a furnace at white heat—had taken possession of his soul. He saw everything clearly at last, realised the trend of those insistent thoughts which hardened his heart. He too had been the victim of circumstances—yes, quite as much so as Vivian Carew. What madness to risk his valuable life for 't worthless one! It would be far better to keep silent for ever

CHAPTER VII

RACHEL'S SECRET

Six weeks later Garth returned home. He did not warn anyone that he was coming, but walked into The Haven unexpectedly one morning.

Rachel, alone in the sitting-room, sprang up to greet him.

"Oh, Stephen, how glad I am to see you! The others are out. Why didn't you let us know?"

"Why? You have no preparations to make for me." He held the girl at arm's length after kissing her. "You don't look very well, Rachel."

"Don't I?" Her lids drooped. "I feel well. We have been so anxious about you, Stephen. It has been an awful time altogether."

"Yes," he said, with an effort; "I suppose none of you have enjoyed yourselves while I have been away."

He could not bring himself to allude to Vivian's trial outright, and he dropped into an arm-chair with a weary air which sat naturally enough upon the man who had been Vivian's friend.

Rachel resumed her seat and the pile of St John's socks she had been mending when he came in, and he gazed at her idly at first, then attentively. It was true that the girl was not looking well. The flush of surprise and pleasure at his arrival had faded from her cheeks now, and she seemed pale, languid, listless. That suggestion of force in reserve, which was usually conveyed by her black eyes and mobile mouth, was absent to-day. She darned as though there were nothing else on earth worth doing.

Garth followed her needle backward and forward, backward and forward.

"We heard wonderful accounts of the people's devotion to you on the Island," she said presently. "I wrote you that your name had been in all the papers, didn't I? You are quite a public man!"

"Yes. Marion said something about it too, and I had several letters from different parts of England besides the one I mentioned to you about setting me up in Harley Street."

"Of course you are going to accept, Stephen?"

"I have already done so. The chance was too good to be missed."

There was so much to talk about, and yet they lapsed into silence again; there was a barrier between them of thoughts neither cared to utter.

"I suppose Colonel Carew and Marion feel the disgrace keenly?" he said at length.

"I think we all feel it keenly," she replied in a low, tremulous tone. "I do."

"You were always fond of Vivian, weren't you?"

"Yes," she said jerkily; "always—fond of him."

She bent her head to bite off the end of her thread. There was a tear rolling down her cheek.

Garth's brows twitched, a sharp pang ran through his aching heart.

"Why, Rachel!" he exclaimed.

She raised her face then, and two wet, despairing, and defiant eyes met his.

"I know. I can't help it," she said.

"Do you care so much?"

"Care isn't the word," she answered. "I loved him, and—yes! I loved him. Everybody may know it now; what does it matter? My heart is broken!"

His tongue cleared to the roof of his mouth. He stared at her with horror and anguish. He cared more for Rachel than for anyone in the world, except Marion. And she loved Vivian Carew. What a fatality—what a fatality that Vivian should have been wrongfully condemned!

If he could have helped her in any way except the one he found impossible!

"Oh, child!" he cried in uncontrollable pity.

The girl sobbed. His sympathy drew her like a magnet. She threw her work away, crawled to his knees, and hid her face there.

"Did he know, Rachel? Did he love you?"

"Yes; we were waiting. His father did not want him to marry yet. I went to say good-bye to him; it was very painful. Stephen, Stephen, can he be guilty? Do you believe it? He loved me."

Garth's teeth met.

"Men who love women do strange things sometimes."

"I shall never believe it," said Rachel drearily.

His hand hovered over her bowed head. He feared to touch her; he would feel a Judas in future whenever he kissed her cheek. It was with an effort that he forced himself to put his arm round her.

By-and-by her sobs wore themselves out.

"I don't know what you must think of me," she said.

"I pity you with all my heart," he answered truthfully. "My poor Rachel, your life is young to be overcast by such a shadow. What can I do for you?"

"Nothing," she said, with a deep, quivering breath. "I must bear it, that is all. Don't let me make you miserable. I am sure you want to go and see Marion." She took his face in her hands in one of her passionate bursts of affection. "God bless you, Stephen! There is no disappointment about you. How lucky she is! She ought to be the happiest woman in the world!"

"How lucky she is!" The echo of Rachel's envious cry pursued him from the house up to Poldinnick. The bitter irony of it! If they knew, these girls, if they only knew, how he would fall from his pedestal!

Marion welcomed her lover with the deepest tenderness.

"At last I have you back, Stephen! What a relief!"

"Your letters," he said, "were the chief event of the day. How is the Colonel?"

"He bears up better than I expected. Grief has frozen him. Vivian's name is not to be mentioned in the house; he is to be considered as dead—poor fellow."

"You say 'poor fellow,' Marion? Then you believe him innocent?"

"Of course I do!" she cried with spirit. "Don't you?"

"Yes," replied Garth, averting his eyes.

"I can't think how anyone who knew him as well as we did could doubt his innocence—Vivian, who would not hurt a fly!"

"And yet his own father, you say, has disowned him?"

"Yes," said Marion. "Oh, it is terrible. Why does God permit such wrongs? Stephen, I have been longing for your return for more reasons than one. Something *must* be done for this wretched boy. I cannot sleep for thinking of him. Can't you do something?"

"What can I do?" he asked huskily.

"I don't know, but try—try," she implored. "He will go mad! He will die!"

"I suppose he was properly defended at the trial?"

"I suppose so. But if I were a man, and his friend, I should never let it drop. I should be unable to rest until I had established his innocence. Is it only women who are loyal?"

Garth covered his face with his hands.

"Do you think I have no pity, Marion? My heart bleeds for him."

"I was unkind!" She uttered a little remorseful cry. "Forgive me. I only wanted to arouse you for his sake, to remind you what it must be like for a young man, and a man of Vivian's active, sanguine temperament, to be shut up half his life in a tomb. Help him for my sake, Stephen."

She did not weep like Rachel; it was not in her nature to cry easily, but her heaving bosom and the pain in her eyes expressed a sympathy for Vivian which made him loathe what he had done. He had stood unmoved beside his father's body; he had weighed his own case and Vivian's on the rock that night, and decided that for once wrong should be right. But, melted by this woman's grief, his spirit grovelled for mercy at her feet. She thought him a hero, but he had sinned; he was a criminal at heart. If he had not killed his father he had allowed him to kill himself, and was permitting the wretched Vivian to work out his expiation—Vivian, and Rachel who loved him. He was blighting their young lives deliberately with the calculation that his own was more valuable.

His hand sought hers; clung to it. He would have done anything for her—except the one thing she asked.

"I shall never forget that you were willing to go to the Island with me," he said. "It was a revelation of woman's love."

"Then you will help him—for my sake?" she said confidently.

"I will see if there is anything to be done," he answered, with musing eyes.

He kept his word, inasmuch that he had an interview with a lawyer on returning to London, and reported the result of it to Marion.

But the consultation had been merely a form designed to please her. Vivian's case was as hopeless as ever when the date of their marriage arrived.

Marion did not forget the companion of her childhood; but the

woman had her own life to live, and it approached perfection the day Garth took her away. Both touched the apex of an idyl, and her smile quivered radiantly through tears when their last glimpse of Poldinnick vanished at a turn of the Craddoc Road. To belong to each other had been a fairy dream which had materialised. She could scarcely believe he was there beside her till she touched him; he could scarcely believe she was his until his lips pressed hers.

It was dull at Carnruan after they were gone, and Rachel moped. The tragic note in the girl's beauty had developed more than ever lately. It had been gratuitous before—mere premonition on the part of nature perhaps, like the "far away" expression nurses speak of in the eyes of the child which will die young. She had excuse now for that wistfulness and yearning: she had loved and lost. Dreaming in the firelight there was that for her to dwell upon which made it difficult to restrain a flow of tears. The marriage of Marion and Stephen had saddened her for many days, not that she begrudged them their happiness, but that she had loved as well, and the contrast was so terrible.

Nevertheless, she dropped back into her old mode of life gradually. Although there was no Vivian at Poldinnick the home circle was the same, and there were the usual duties to attend to and the usual occupations of country life. The winter was coming to an end too in Cornwall, and spring was at hand with its cheerful note of life renewed. Ferns were uncurling in the lanes, the tender corn was shooting through the red-brown soil; there were crocuses in the gardens and young lambs in the pastures.

Rachel, passing through St Ruth one afternoon, hesitated at sight of John Tregenna's house. She had not seen the mine owner since the evening he had called at The Haven, and his avoidance of her had softened her anger. She had decided long ago that the man must have been taking a little too much drink, and had felt ashamed of himself afterwards. She was disinclined, on that account, to resent his foolish impertinence any longer, and thought she would call on Mrs Tregenna, who was rather a favourite of hers. She had been walking a long way, and Prudence would give her a cup of tea, and air her grievances

against the servants, which always eased the poor soul's mind. Tregenna would not be home at this hour.

As it happened, however, he had been over to Craddoc on business, and came in as Prudence was pouring out the tea. At sight of Rachel he turned red with mingled pleasure and embarrassment.

"Glad to see you, Miss Garth." Then he scowled at his wife. "Why the dickens don't you have tea in the drawing-room when a young lady calls to see you?"

"In the drawing-room, John?" said poor Prudence, fluttered.

"Yes, of course. What do you think you've got a drawing-room for—to keep in holland covers and look at once a year?"

"I am sure," said Rachel, hastening to the rescue, "the tea tastes just as nice in the dining-room, Mrs Tregenna. And it is such delicious tea."

"Have some cake," said Tregenna with the gruffness a man of his type assumes to hide emotion, and he offered her the dish tenderly, as he would have offered her his heart. "I didn't know how I was to be rewarded for coming home early to-day. It's very good of you to look in and see my missus, Miss Rachel."

"There is no question of goodness; I like to come," said Rachel. "Mrs Tregenna is always so kind to me."

Tregenna was shifting impatiently in his chair. It seemed such a waste of time for Rachel to be talking about his wife.

"I've got a splendid litter of terrier pups," he said. "Maybe you'd like to have one of 'em? I know you're fond of dogs. We can go and look at 'em by-and-by, and you can have your choice."

"Thank you, Mr Tregenna; but I don't think I should like another dog so soon after poor Spot's death."

"Just as you like, of course," said Tregenna, disappointed. "How's the widder getting on?"

"Bathsheba Penrose, you mean? Poor thing, she thinks if she could afford to take a little house over at Craddoc, and let lodgings in the summer, she might be able to make both ends meet, but I am afraid it isn't possible to raise money enough for the extra furniture."

"How much would it take?" asked Tregenna thoughtfully.

"We calculated that she ought not to attempt it with less than sixty pounds. Colonel Carew has promised her ten if she can raise the other fifty."

"I could give it to her if I liked," he said.

"Yes ; if you liked !"

"I'll give it to *you*," he said. "You can do as you please with it."

She could not resist so tempting an offer. Her eyes glistened, she flushed, she melted.

"Oh, how generous of you, Mr Tregenna ! Fifty pounds !"

"I'll go upstairs and get it," said the big man, rising. "You'd better have it while I am in the humour."

He did not ask his wife or make the least feint of consulting her wishes. It was his money, and if he considered he was getting his value for it he knew his own business best.

Prudence, sitting meekly behind the best tea-tray, in the worn plum-coloured garment of antediluvian fashion which she habitually wore on week-days, had as little thought of interfering. Tregenna was master. Her faded eyes merely followed him to the door with an expression of mild surprise. He was not always so generous. She had heard him refuse a copper to a beggar quite roughly the other day.

CHAPTER VIII

A SLEEPER WAKES

At the end of their honeymoon Marion and Stephen returned to Poldinnick for a week before going home to their house in Harley Street, which was already furnished and ready for them.

Stephen did not think his mother was looking well, and seized the first opportunity for a quiet talk with her.

"You are not worried about anything ?" he asked.

"Scarcely worried," murmured Mrs Garth. "I am a little depressed sometimes ; I hoped I did not show it."

"What is the matter ?"

"You'll smile at me," she said hurriedly. "I've been having

such bad dreams, Stephen—terrible dreams which make me afraid to go to bed. Even in the daytime I cannot forget them. They are always the same: he has found us, he is here! I see the door open and that dreaded face appear—a terrible face, bloated, vicious, gloating—the face of the brute whence the soul has fled.”

It was evident that her old dread of her husband's return was increasing and was affecting her health, and it seemed hard to Garth that he could not relieve her mind by assuring her the man was dead. If prudence conquered filial affection, he left her, nevertheless, with a heavy heart.

A craving for sympathy drew him to his wife. The emotional side of him, usually in abeyance, had been aroused. He sat down on the couch beside Marion and put his arm round her waist.

“Was it a pleasant day, dearest?”

“How could it be otherwise—with your people and you? But I could not help thinking of Vivian.”

“You must forget him, or you will make yourself unhappy,” said Garth. “He has gone out of your life for ever.”

“Carnruan is so intimately associated in my mind with him,” she said. “You need not be jealous. It is such a little bit of my heart that I can steal away from you!”

“Ah, you are sweet!” he cried. “Every day that I live with you I seem to love you better than I loved you yesterday.”

“May it always be so, Stephen, my husband,” she said, thrilled and flushed by his passion. “If I thought you would ever tire of me——”

Her arms strained him to her breast. He kissed her again and again upon the lips.

“A man does not tire of happiness. I have waited so long for it—for you. And how many can say as I can, that I have found even more than I hoped to find? You are a perfect wife, Marion, a perfect woman.”

“Oh, far from it!” she said tenderly, stroking his cheek. “You love me, that is all. I am so thankful I have not disappointed you.”

“You don't know,” he said, with a certain note of yearning in

his voice, "how much I needed you, Marion. Loneliness is a curse. When I lean my head on your shoulder the world seems bounded by your arms—closer, sweetheart, closer still!—and I can forget everything that worries me."

"But you have no worries, Stephen?"

He remained silent, and she repeated her question presently.

"I am troubled about my mother," he confessed at length.

"Why? Is she unwell?"

The temptation to confide in her a little was too strong for him; he loved her, and his mood felt the need of drawing their bonds still closer. It was night, and silent, and in the glow of the lamplight she looked so beautiful.

"You do not know everything," he said. "I have had a secret from you all along. Forgive me—it is not mine alone. My mother was not a widow when she came to Carnruan. She had a bad husband, and fled from him with her children for their good. St John, Rachel, and Mamie do not know it. I should have thought it my duty to tell you before our marriage, only that I had every reason to believe he was dead. Are you angry?"

"Why should I be angry?" she said thoughtfully. "I pity your mother, your poor mother, Stephen. I understand now why she looks so sad sometimes. If I had known I should have been kinder to her."

"Lately she has been seeing him in her dreams, and has got it into her head that he is coming to Carnruan, to discover her and plant himself on me. I have assured her she need not be alarmed, but she will not be convinced. She is allowing to make her miserable."

"Why do you think he is dead, Stephen?"

"I employed a detective to trace him some time ago, and we came to the conclusion that he must be dead. You will not mention this to St John or the girls? They think their father was an honourable man, and it would be needlessly cruel to disillusion them. I could not resist telling you."

"No; you must have no secrets from me, Stephen," she said.

"I want to know everything—everything good and bad."

"Everything!" he repeated. There was a note of anguish in

his voice. He looked her in the eyes swiftly, then bent his head to kiss her hand. "My Marion," he murmured, "you who are so pure, so good, you do not know what men are made of! I am not worthy of you. Would to God I were!"

"I am content," she said, a glow of confidence and peace upon her face.

The clock struck eleven, and they went up to bed presently. Marion was tired by a day in the strong air of her old home, but, agitated by what Stephen had told her, she lay awake thinking for some time. She remembered now that Mrs Garth had never called herself a widow outright; they had all taken it for granted. She was sorry for both mother and son. She could imagine what a dread must have been hanging over them for years that the undesirable husband and father would reappear. Without being a worldly-minded woman she could not help hoping Stephen was not mistaken in supposing old Garth would be seen no more. It would be so bitter to a proud man like her husband to be forced to acknowledge a disgraceful origin; the otherwise perfect opening of their married life would be marred, the brilliant career which lay before him dimmed.

His courage must have been sorely tried many times, and she had not known it. She admired him for concealing the brutal truth from the younger ones. That was true self-sacrifice—to bear alone the burden which others might have shared. It was like him to take upon himself the task of protecting and providing for his mother and sisters. He was a good son, a good brother, a perfect husband, a physician as unselfish and devoted as he was skilful; in fact, a man apparently faultless in every path of life. How blessed she was to have won him! His breathing told her he was asleep, or she would have been unable to refrain from saying there and then how very much she thought of him. Her heart melted in a gush of adoration, her eyes worshipped him in the dim light which stole through the blinds. She had been too cold to him. There were so many things she might have said and left unsaid to-night. It would spoil some men to be for ever praising them, making love to them, but nothing could spoil him. She could not understand why she had been so lacking in eloquence. There were a hundred phrases on the tip of her

tongue now clamouring for utterance. How flat and tame she had been when the opportunity was there! She wished he would wake.

The man twitched in his sleep, muttering brokenly, with the restlessness of excited nerves.

"If they only knew he was my father, and that I—I . . . The Rocking Stone! . . . Vivian! . . ."

A quiver ran through Marion. Her heart beat like a hammer; all the blood in her body seemed surging to her brain.

"And she loves me!" he whispered. "She loves me!"

His voice, low and thrilling, poignant with the anguish of the damned, seemed to pierce her very flesh.

His body slept, but his soul was waking, and it was his soul which spoke to her.

She sat up and gazed at him. A sensation of dizziness overcame her. She could scarcely believe the scene was real. It could not be—and yet it was! He was lying there—she touched him lightly to make sure—and the familiar objects of the room were growing visible in the moonlight one by one.

She had not thought out the meaning of his utterance. It had struck her instantly with the shock and certainty of a bludgeon blow. It was he who was guilty. He *knew* his father was dead.

Her agony broke from her in one wail:

"God, that I had died yesterday!"

Her voice woke him with a start.

"Are you there, Marion? Did you call?"

It was just light enough for him to see that she was leaning on her elbow, watching him.

"I did not call," she said in a tone which was curiously subdued. "You were talking in your sleep, my husband."

"Is that all!" He sighed. "I thought there was something the matter."

He fell asleep again, but Marion was more wakeful than ever. It seemed to her she had been sleeping a long while, and would never sleep again. She turned away her face, and lay—thinking.

CHAPTER IX

CONDEMNED

MARION had already risen when Garth came down to breakfast the next morning. She looked pale and serious, but composed and suitably dressed. She was one of those women whose appearance seems to be the outcome of a natural orderliness of mind; the pure, faint tints of her skin, her white hands, her figure in its well-cut gown, were like emblems of the morning.

She was reading aloud from the newspaper to her uncle, and her voice, with its well-modulated and refined intonation, was as perfect as her form and face. It was a dainty and graceful possession that Stephen Garth had taken to himself, and his ownership was still a novelty which thrilled him many times a day.

"You are late. Coffee's been on the table five minutes," said Colonel Carew.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Garth, smiling. "I fear I overslept myself. It is Marion's fault! She should have aroused me."

"The woman tempted me and I did eat," quoted the Colonel. "Marion, my dear, make your husband stand on his own feet. Don't allow him to make a crutch of you!"

She smiled faintly as she took her place at the head of the table. She had not spoken since Garth had come into the room, and she did not speak now, but began to pour out the coffee. The Colonel was in a talkative mood; he had always liked Garth, and, by the irony of circumstances, clung more to him since Vivian's conviction. He seemed to find in the young doctor who had married his niece the earnestness and stability of character which his son had lacked, and the Garths' visit had roused him from the state of morose dejection into which he had fallen. This morning he was far brighter than he had been for a long time, and Marion regarded the two men—her husband and Vivian's father—with a brooding note of wonder in her eyes. Had Fate no sense of humour, or so much that mere mortals were amazed?

The Colonel went away to write letters after breakfast, and Marion picked up a newspaper. She looked even paler and more serious than she had looked at breakfast, and her lips were compressed.

"Is there any news this morning?" asked Garth.

"I don't know," she answered.

"Did you get any letters?"

"No."

He seemed to perceive at last that there was something wrong.

"You are not offended with me, Marion?"

"Offended is scarcely the word."

"What is the matter?" he asked quickly.

"We will talk in another room if you like," she said, with a glance at the butler, who had entered to clear the table, "but I—I am in no hurry if you would rather read the paper."

He gave her a glance of expostulation—smiling, anxious, curious too. They had not had a quarrel since their marriage, and she was not "touchy" as a rule. He followed her into the library, and waited for her to speak, but she remained silent for a moment, as though struggling with some emotion which conquered her voice. His hand strayed to her arm; he was so unconscious of giving offence that he could not believe she was seriously angry.

She deliberately drew away from him. He was startled.

"Marion, what do you mean?"

She looked up then, and her face frightened him still more. Her cheeks were absolutely colourless.

"You were talking in your sleep last night," she said.

"Yes; you told me so."

"You were talking in your sleep," she repeated in a whisper.

Suddenly he understood. Her voice, her eyes told him. He went ashy grey. His lips trembled, he stared at her in horror. At last words came to him, stumbling in haste.

"What did I say? Was it something—something——? Marion, you cannot make a man responsible for what he says in his sleep!"

She made a gesture of despair.

"What do you think?" he asked hoarsely.

"I do not want to talk about it!"

"But you must," he said with a certain violence. "Will you condemn me unheard? What did I say?"

"Enough—too much! Poor Vivian!"

His brain was curiously blank. He tried to frame a sentence, a question, which should admit nothing, and carry conviction with it, but words would not come. It was the consciousness that she had already made up her mind, and that nothing he could say mattered, which paralysed him with his own futility. For once in his life he wished she had been a different type—the usual young girl, who would have wept and listened and believed.

"It was an accident!" he cried. "I swear to you it was an accident. He was drunk; he fell. My only sin was silence."

She did not answer.

"Marion, do you believe me?"

"And if I do?" she asked. "The silence—the silence! Oh my God, and I loved you!"

"We have our lives to live together," he said brokenly, and seized her hand. "By-and-by you will——"

"Forget? Is that the word you are trying to utter? You know better than that, Stephen." Her voice seemed to pulsate with the throbbing of her heart. "You must confess. It is the only possible atonement."

He looked at her, and his lips moved silently before a husky answer dropped from them.

"I cannot."

She turned away from him with a calmness far more effective than passion would have been.

"Marion, Marion, you will not make a scandal!" he cried. "You cannot! You are my wife."

She hid her face against the mantelpiece. The unreality of it all held him helpless—limbs, brain, voice—as in a vice. Was this the woman who had been a miracle of tenderness yesterday? A hush as of death fell over the room. He did not think she was crying; she seemed petrified. He made a step towards her—a tempest raging in his breast—a step back. He knew the happiness of his life hung on his conduct at this crisis, and he felt as weak as a child. If another man had been in his position

he would have said: "Lie, lie for all you are worth! It is your duty to her as well as to yourself," but he could not find the courage to do it. She was less a girl than a woman at this moment; her self-command froze him; her clear head and discernment, which he had often admired, filled him with awe. It was as a judge that she had looked at him, not as a wife; as a judge who had already summed up and condemned the guilty.

The door opened and Colonel Carew put his head in.

"Ah, there you are, Stephen! I wish you would come and give me your advice a moment."

The man, forced to follow, left the room in a dream; the woman shook herself together with a little shiver. Even now she could scarcely believe it. Perhaps if he had kept his face and had had the courage to meet her veiled accusation brazenly she might have taken his word: men say such strange things in their dreams. But his voice had faltered, and his manner had expressed the unmistakable self-consciousness of guilt. Exactly what had happened on the cliff that night she did not know, and did not dare to know; it was enough for her that Stephen, not Vivian, was responsible for the old man's death, and that her husband had played the part of a coward and traitor towards his friend. The idol of her life had fallen low—so low!

She saw him in the hall presently. She thought he hesitated to speak to her, waiting for her to break the ice, but her white lips remained shut.

He made a movement as though to follow her upstairs, and sighed instead. The butler was arranging some new magazines on a table. Garth called him.

"Tell Mrs Garth I am going over to The Haven for the day."

If his voice travelled after her up the well of the staircase she made no sign, and he left the house with a heavy heart.

CHAPTER X

BETRAVER AND BETRAYED

FOR the first time since her marriage Marion sat down to dinner alone that evening. Garth had not returned, and business had

taken her uncle to Plymouth, where he meant to spend the night.

It was dreary. She had never noticed before that the dining-room at her old home was so large and gaunt. The mahogany-coloured portraits in their old gold frames frowned at her, the Turkey carpet and heavy velvet curtains seemed to absorb the light, and the wind whined in the chimney as it could do nowhere better than at Poldinnick with a "sou'-wester" creeping up.

There was a weight like lead on her breast; it seemed to be crushing the life out of her; she could scarcely breathe.

She would not sit up in the hall to-night; it was so big, and the wide oak staircase led to unknown gloom. She went to the small morning-room she used to call her own, and looked out.

There was just light enough from a hidden moon to reveal a sky darkened by masses of heavy cloud, and a wide stretch of churning ocean, and the hills rising and falling in dull green billows like another sea. The view was as familiar to her as her own face. She had seen it in all weathers, at all hours. But never before had it struck her as being so gloomy, so desolate, so wild. She took a sudden dislike to it—a dislike which resembled fear. Surely there was tragedy in the very aspect of this place, and her imagination must have been asleep to miss the warning note of nature! She should have been prepared for some evil to happen with such a *mise-en-scène* prepared. Another woman would have been on the watch, waiting. Vivian's arrest would have been but the first outright roll of the muffled drums she had been listening to all her life.

She turned from the window with a shiver, although it was warm enough for thunder: the chill was in her soul to-night. A sensation of intense loneliness—the first she had ever felt—emptied the world before her weary eyes. She was not a coward, but she had become afraid of life. The fair place in which she had dwelt had changed to a leper-house, and she no longer knew the face of the one she had loved best of all.

She picked up a book and made an effort to read, but the solitude she used to find mere peacefulness preyed upon her nerves.

A soft tapping suddenly brought her heart to her mouth. She waited for it to die away like the other nameless sounds of the

night. It stopped, and began again—louder this time, insistently, even a little impatiently.

She looked over her shoulder. There was a face at the window—a pale face pressed against the glass.

With a gasp she sprang to her feet; her hands flew to the latch.

"Vivian!"

He stood uncertain of her, gazing—the lost sheep who had come home. She opened the window wide—still wider. The haven of her pitiful arms claimed him. He dropped on his knees and hid his face in her dress.

"Marion! O Marion!"

"How did you get here?"

"I escaped yesterday. They have been hunting me like a mad dog. I am famished, worn out."

"Tired, hungry," she murmured, "my broken heart!"

"You were always true," he said, with a sob. "Oh, I have suffered, Marion!"

Her hands gripped his shoulders, stroked his cheeks with divine compassion as though she would make her touch balm to heal that wounded soul.

"Yes. I too, thinking of you. I would have done anything. . . . You knew that I was loyal, didn't you?" Her voice was anxious, craving for his assurance. "You never doubted that?"

"You kissed me, God bless you," he said, "when my father turned his back. It was on you that I pinned my faith; it is to you that I have come to-night. I was watching you through the window for an hour before I dared to knock. If you had failed me——!"

"My poor Vivian, my brother; I am the best friend you have in the world. Oh, that I could comfort you!"

"Your voice is music, Marion; a woman's voice which cares for me!"

"Are you crying?" she asked brokenly. "Oh, don't for my sake. Get up, Vivian. Show me your face. I want to feed you; I want to help you. Tell me what to do and I will do it with all my heart."

A tear dropped upon his haggard, upturned face. He rose instantly.

"Why, it is you who are crying!" he said.

"Because I am sorry for you; because—oh, you don't know, Vivian!"

She laid her hand on his shoulder again, gazing at him through a mist.

"I have prayed for you very often," she said. "Perhaps my prayer is answered to-day. How did you escape?"

"In a fog. It was a plot between two or three of us. I struck the railroad, and boarded a goods train in the night. All day I remained hidden in a barn near Craddoc. When it was dark again I struck for home across country, avoiding the roads and houses and every sign of life, like the hunted beast I am. Oh, Marion, liberty is sweet! If they take me—if they take me——"

"They shall not take you!" she answered passionately. "God would not be so cruel. You are safe here. Your father is away, my husband is out, and none of the servants would betray you for your weight in gold."

"Your husband?" he repeated. "So you are married, Marion!"

"Yes," she said faintly. "I am married. We are only down on a visit. You might not have found me after all."

"Then Garth is here too?" The fugitive's face brightened. "How lucky! He is such a capital fellow; he'll help me as no one else can! What is the matter, Marion? Why do you look at me like that?"

"You have changed so much," she faltered, with her strained and anguished eyes still upon his face. "I never saw such a change in a few months. And you are a strong man, Vivian!"

"I *was* strong," he answered, looking down. "Troubles like mine don't go into one's boots. You can't realise what it is like."

"I think I can!"

"I was nearly out of my mind at first. I refused to eat, and they made me. I raved and cursed—and cried, Marion."

"I would have taken your place if I could," she said.

He stared at her, surprised at her passion.

"You say that because you pity me."

"Yes—yes. I pity you so much. If only I knew what to do——"

"You can give me some clothes and food, and money with which to escape. They know that and will look for me here first of all. But I had to come. I had nowhere else to go. My God, what have I done that I should be treated like this? Why should I be the scapegoat? I am innocent, Marion, innocent."

"I know," she said.

"And I am a beggared outcast, nameless, homeless, fatherless! I was a rich man's son; what am I now? I dare not hope to be allowed to black the boots of the men who were my friends. I shall have to disappear, and my father will never know that I am innocent."

She was nearly torn in two. If he knew what she knew! He was dragging the truth from her by his grief. Eloquence was beyond Vivian; but she could feel every flush of shame which had dyed his cheeks; his despair ate into her soul; she hungered with his hunger, agonised with his suspense. The man was innocent, innocent, and she was gazing at his ruined life. His wrongs screamed to her for redress; silence seemed a crime to their common humanity. But the other man was her husband. His ring upon her hand claimed her loyalty. Whatever he was, how could his wife betray him?

The moment had come which it was foredoomed that she must face. She stood between them absolute, but shrinking, quivering in every nerve.

The scales swung up and down.

"How is my father, Marion?"

"He is well in health."

"I suppose he will never forgive me?"

"I am afraid not, Vivian—unless your innocence is proved."

"Does he ever speak of me?"

"Your name is forbidden in the house," she said with almost brutal truthfulness, driving the dagger into her own breast as into his. "He has cut you out of his will. One can see that the dishonour which has overcome you preys upon his mind

continually, although he never mentions it. He is to be pitied almost as much as you."

"And I am innocent, Marion; I am innocent!"

Again that cry of anguish! She could not bear it. Why, indeed, should he be the scapegoat? Every man must be answerable for his own actions. Words broke from her almost despite herself.

"You may be able to clear yourself still!"

"How? It is impossible!"

"If you are innocent someone else must be guilty. We will find him! You shall not suffer in his place."

She was like one inspired with the fire of martyrdom! Carried away by her own fervour her eyes shone and her voice was breathless.

He was caught up on the wings of her excitement, and soared for a moment, then fell.

"But why need anyone be guilty?" he asked doubtfully. "The drunken old scoundrel may have stumbled and fallen over of his own accord. What was his life to anyone?"

"It may have been more than you imagine!"

"Surely you *know nothing*, Marion!"

She did not seem to hear him. As he watched her the pale light on her face died.

"Hush!" she said in a low, strained tone. "There is someone coming. It is not a servant. I heard the hall door open. Perhaps it is Stephen come back."

"I need not fear him," said Vivian, relieved. "Make sure, Marion!"

He drew back, waiting. She put her hand to her heart. Her first instinct was to hide the convict, but she conquered it. She set her teeth, and opened the door.

"Is that you, Stephen?"

"Yes," said Garth, who was taking off his coat in the hall.

"Will you come here?" she said. "I want you."

Garth came slowly, with an inquiring gaze fixed upon his wife. She had not called him in a tone of affection, although her voice sounded emotional. Perhaps he was afraid she had something to say which he would not like to hear. He dreaded her re-

proaches; he dreaded still more an appeal from her for a confession he would be obliged to refuse. Another scene would estrange them farther from each other, yet he could not expect that she would let such a matter drop without more discussion. There was bound to be a storm sooner or later.

She stood aside as he approached, and he entered the room unsuspectingly. A gasp like the rending of a soul broke from him. They stood face to face, betrayer and betrayed, and the woman who knew the secret watched them both. She held her breath, her hands clenched. What she felt at that moment only God could know.

Garth glanced from the convict to his wife. His lips moved soundlessly.

"You are my friend?" queried Vivian anxiously. "I can trust you?"

It was evident that he knew nothing yet. Garth's eyes sought Marion's in passionate appeal; hers met his unflinchingly.

"He asks if you are to be trusted?" she said. "He has escaped, as you see, and has come to us for help."

"Of course," said Garth, "I will do my best. He can rely upon it."

The tension snapped. He understood by her face, as she meant him to understand, that the mute prayer was answered. She turned to the door.

"I am going to order a meal for him, and to keep watch. I will leave you to talk together."

When the men were alone Garth passed his hand across his forehead; he had not realised until this moment that it was wet. Vivian advanced slowly.

"You haven't shaken hands with me, Stephen."

"I beg your pardon," said Garth, pulling himself together. "I believe I am a little dazed. Your appearance is unexpected, to say the least of it!"

Vivian dropped wearily into a chair, and the doctor took mechanical note of the effect that confinement and physical hardship and mental suffering had had upon him. His face was thin, which produced deep lines round the mouth; his eyes were strained and bloodshot; he fidgeted with his hands, too

nervous to keep still. He might have been quite ten years older than when Garth saw him last. His buoyancy had gone; he was no longer young.

"How is Rachel?" he asked suddenly in a low, hoarse voice.

"Very well, I believe. She has gone up to Harley Street to put our house straight for us."

"Then she is not at home?" said Vivian. He seemed disappointed. "You are starting in Harley Street, Stephen? Lucky chap! You have everything in the world, it seems to me: good prospects, a decent income, a beautiful wife!"

"Oh, I am very lucky!" replied Garth. A smile of inexpressible bitterness twisted his lips; he turned away. "What are you going to do? I should advise you to get out of this as quickly as possible."

"I'm going."

"Come up to my room and change your clothes before you eat. I'll go first, and clear the way."

The convict was a stranger in his own home. He slunk up the staircase afraid of every shadow, every sound; because it was all so familiar it was strange. Was it possible that he had ever lived here? He had never noticed before how soft the carpets were, how rich the curtains, how comfortable and well-furnished the dressing-room into which Garth led him, who had once been the heir. He had accepted the luxury which had surrounded him from birth as a matter of course in the old days. That he should have whatever he wanted had seemed no less natural than that there was air to breathe. If only the present state of things were a nightmare, and he could wake to find existence as it used to be!

"Fortunately," said Garth, "my clothes are only a trifle short for you. I'll bury these things"—he touched the convict's hideous garments with the tips of his fingers—"after you are gone. I daresay you would like a hot bath, but you had better not wait for it; I am feverish to get you off the premises."

It was true. To see Vivian rearrested under his eyes would be horrible. He was not a brute, although fate, as he considered it, had forced a brutal part upon him. He was truly moved to

the deepest compassion for his friend, and he had a personal interest as well in the convict's safety. Marion was here, and the effect of such a scene upon her might be disastrous.

"One feels another man," said Vivian, completing his toilet with a sigh of relief.

"Here is money," said Garth. "Communicate with me when you need more. Let us hear from you."

"Yes." Vivian took the little roll of bank notes, and his anxious face quivered. "Thanks, awfully. I don't know what I should have done without you and Marion. I suppose my father wouldn't have stretched out a hand to help me?"

Something caught Garth by the throat with a choking clutch.

"You needn't be grateful," he said. "Oh, my God!"

"What is the matter?"

"I am very sorry for you. I wish it had been anyone—almost anyone—else."

On the way downstairs the door of his father's room made Vivian pause. A sentimental impulse led him to open it and glance inside. He cast a shamefaced look at Garth as he did so.

"He has forsaken me," he murmured, "but he is my father still. Poor old chap, he was very good to me. When is he coming back?"

"To-morrow, I believe. He has only gone to Plymouth about a lease, or something of that sort."

"Will you tell him I have been here?"

"I shall leave it to Marion. She knows best."

"Perhaps he would think the house was polluted by sheltering me for half-an-hour," said Vivian between his teeth. "He is as proud as Lucifer. Good Lord, that ever I should slink through these doors as a convict with the broad arrow on my clothes! It is enough to make all the Carews turn in their graves!"

The table was laid with a substantial meal when they descended, and the old butler stood in attendance. He was a Devonshire man, with an undisguised contempt for Cornwall, and only affection for the Colonel kept him here. His bleached and withered face was twisted into a pucker of distress to-night.

"Hullo, Bennet!" said Vivian.

"I am glad to see you, Mr Vivian," said the old man, bowing with deep emotion and respect.

He waited on the "young master," hovering round him with painful attentiveness.

"Where is Mrs Garth?" asked Vivian.

"She's put a shawl on, and gone down to the gate, sir, to keep watch. She'll see you before you go."

Vivian bolted his food without tasting it, while Garth looked on in silence, and Bennet changed the plates.

"It's only a skinny Cornish fowl, sir, and I can't get you a good slice off the breast," he murmured tremulously, "but I thought you'd like a bit o' poultry."

Vivian finished his meal.

"I'd better go," he said. "It's too risky to stop here any longer. I shall try and get across the Channel by-and-by."

"Yes, by-and-by. London is the best place for you at present," said Garth. "Good-bye, Vivian. Good luck."

"Thanks again," said Vivian brokenly. "You're a true friend, Stephen. You have always been a true friend to me."

CHAPTER XI

THE LOCKED DOOR

WHEN Vivian was gone Garth went into the smoking-room. There was always a fire there, except in the hottest days of August, and a fire was company. It gave a man something to stare at besides the future. He hoped Vivian would escape. It would soothe Marion to know he was free; she would not have quite such a tragedy to dwell upon. He wondered if his behaviour to-night had softened her, or if she supposed he had acted well towards Vivian through fear of her alone? His conscience was clear on that point. He was still fond of Vivian, and the signs of physical deterioration shown by the convict pained him inexpressibly. It was hard that the squalid, pitiful tragedy would have its victim.

He sighed heavily. Much as he regretted Vivian's misery

his trouble was the greater that Marion knew. Who but a woman could have leapt at things as she had done! He might have argued with a man; a man would have listened to reason which was not truth. She *knew*. He might talk for a year unavailingly, and he had not the heart to talk at all. Her clear eyes had penetrated to his soul, and read the secret there.

She had not spoken, he had that for comfort. He turned hot in mere recollection of that moment of uncertainty. But if her silence had ranged her on his side—the wife's place—her manner had frozen his warm and leaping gratitude. So much she had done for him, but when they were alone what would she have to say? He had not seen her since Vivian left; he was afraid to seek her. And yesterday she had been a girl, soft and yielding, who could not find a fault in him. What a misfortune that he should have betrayed himself in such a way! He knew that he talked in his sleep at times. It was only the sign of an over-excited brain, but what a complication it had brought into his life! She had left him this morning as though her love for him were dead. He would never forget her face.

The fire was dying; the clock struck twelve; Garth did not move. He was trying to anticipate what his wife would say to him when he went upstairs—if she would say anything at all. He wished he knew how to appeal to her. The tone she had adopted was impossible if they were to live together in anything like unity.

She had gone to bed without speaking to him, and he had hoped she would seek him after Vivian was gone. She had kept his secret; she *must* care. Even in the first heat of her indignation his interests had swayed her most. She could not mean to quarrel with him. She was his wife. She, who knew him so well, must realise to what an agony of temptation he had succumbed; how he had been drawn into the vortex through an accident, almost without will of his own. What could she expect of him under such circumstances? He regretted his fall passionately because she knew, but he was still of the opinion that he had acted, sentiment apart, as a reasoning man should act. The fact still remained incontrovertible that his life was far more valuable both to his family and to the world

at large than Vivian's. He had had three women dependent upon him; he had talents which it would be a sin for humanity to lose; and Vivian was mentally and constitutionally incapable of being of the least service to his kind. Yes, even now, with his heart lacerated by Marion's anger and pain, it seemed to him that he had only followed the dictates of common-sense. The average man must accept the conventional morality, because he is unable to discriminate for himself; the subtler shades of right and wrong are lost upon him; a thing is black or it is white. The man of intellect knows that an action which is bad under certain circumstances may be justified by others. He was not a child at Sunday school, and he had chosen the course he sincerely considered the best for the majority.

That Marion should have discovered the truth was a terrible misfortune. Nothing could console him for the loss of her love or for her loss of happiness. He had always meant to shelter her; he had intended her life to be as perfect as love could make it; and it was through him that her first great sorrow had come. The blow was a hard one. If he could have borne her burden as well as his own he would have taken it upon his shoulders without complaint.

As though drawn thither by his thoughts of her she came to him at last. He heard the door behind him open and the soft rustle of her dress. He did not turn, and she paused by the threshold. A live coal fell with a thud upon the hearth and smouldered. Garth watched the smoke curl upward and disperse. The fire would not last much longer.

She had risen from her bed and thrown a wrapper over her nightgown—a robe of soft white silk which might have graced a vestal virgin. The straight folds from throat to foot gave her an air of almost austere purity. But the candle in her hand trembled as though with the beating of her heart, and her cheeks were colourless and her lids heavy with the shedding of many tears. Her voice was low but very clear.

"Did you tell him, Stephen?"

The man's hands, which had been resting on the arms of his chair as she entered, quivered and closed. He shook his head.

She waited a moment in uncertainty. He did not speak.

She turned, sighing like a lost soul, and softly shut the door.

It was scarcely with the hope of receiving the answer she longed for that she had put her question ; nevertheless, his silent negative had destroyed her last drowning grasp of peace. His heart was hardened ; he was obstinate. Even her horror of what he had done could not drive him to atone.

He had committed a great sin, but if he had made the only possible reparation she would have pardoned him. She did not believe that he had murdered his father ; she was willing to accept his version of what had happened on that terrible night. It was his silence which broke her heart. That he should allow another man to be convicted of murder without speaking—Vivian of all men, Vivian—her cousin, his friend ! She had conceived him to be above reproach. If he had come forward boldly and honourably at the right time, no amount of circumstantial evidence could have made her doubt him. She would have trusted him without a tremor, and loved him more, if possible, in her pity, than before.

She felt as though there were a death in the house, and in some ways she would have found his death easier to bear. It would have been easier to mourn for him than to tear him out of her heart. Unless he repented how could she forgive ? It was not in her power to condone his injury to another ; she would be as culpable as he. Even a merciful God could not forgive what he had done.

She moved about her room for a while, her fingers interlaced in agony. She was weary of weeping, but her dry and hollow eyes were eloquent, and her face had grown haggard in a day. She moaned, and made a gesture almost frantic, as though her thoughts were more than she could bear. It was a hard position for any woman, but, young as she was, perhaps she was more equal to it than ninety-nine out of a hundred would have been. She was not weak ; she was steadfast ; she had a mind almost as clear and well balanced as a man's. Those grave eyes of hers were penetrating and thoughtful, and saw things as they were.

He had sinned, and while he remained in a state of sin both of them must suffer—he for his own good, she through him. He

should not imagine for a moment that he could make his peace with her because she loved him. It was to her as though God had made her his judge, and she delivered the sentence, which included herself, relentlessly. There could be no happiness without repentance. That Vivian had escaped through his own desperate enterprise, to lead a secret and fugitive life, was no absolution for the wrong done to him. The innocent man must be cleared at any cost; confession must be made. She turned her gaze upon the door: it seemed to fascinate her. Gradually she approached it. For an instant she hesitated still, then she turned the key in the lock and went to bed. She was falling asleep when the handle turned. She sat up, with her heart beating. But the door was locked and she did not open it.

CHAPTER XII

TREGENNA'S SENTIMENTS

It was "dining-room day" at Tregennas', and Prudence was worn out. She was not a strong woman, but she felt idle if she sat down for more than ten minutes together. Since breakfast-time she had been superintending the maids, testing the cleanliness of shelves and picture frames by the application of a sceptical finger, and rubbing and polishing with her own hands the innumerable things she would not allow a servant to touch. If she had been dying she would have risen to dust the dining-room pictures on Tuesday and the glass shades in the drawing-room on Friday.

And despite her care accidents would happen. In the act of washing the best cut-glass and silver claret jug, which usually occupied an ornamental position on the sideboard, it slid through her hands, which were slippery with soap suds, and broke in three upon the floor. An expression of positive anguish overspread Prudence's face. Her features twisted as though she were going to cry. And the worst of it was, she could blame nobody but herself. If one of the maids had been responsible for the calamity she would have been able to scold her, to

say "I told you so!" and point a moral concerning the carelessness of "girls" in general and this one in particular. But it was she who had smashed the claret jug.

"It cost three pounds," she wailed, "and I always liked the pattern so much. Digwall's only had that one, I remember."

She dropped on her knees, her face all working, and picked up the pieces.

"It's splintered," she said. "I thought so! I sha'n't be able to get it riveted, and I am sure I shall never get a new glass made to fit. Something is always happening. Yesterday it was that scratch on the inlaid table and to-day *this*."

She spent half-an-hour trying to fit the pieces together. But there was already a fragment gone. The two maids were set to grovel on hands and knees in search of it, and Prudence herself was under the table when Tregenna came in.

"Lord!" he said, "has the woman gone mad? What are you doing there?"

Prudence got up.

"Such an awful thing has happened," she said, "and I am sure I was as careful as anyone could be. I can't think why I am always having these misfortunes. Other people who don't take 'arf the trouble——"

"What's the matter?" asked Tregenna, falling over her mouth brusquely with his strident voice. "Have you seen the devil—or lost a salt-spoon?"

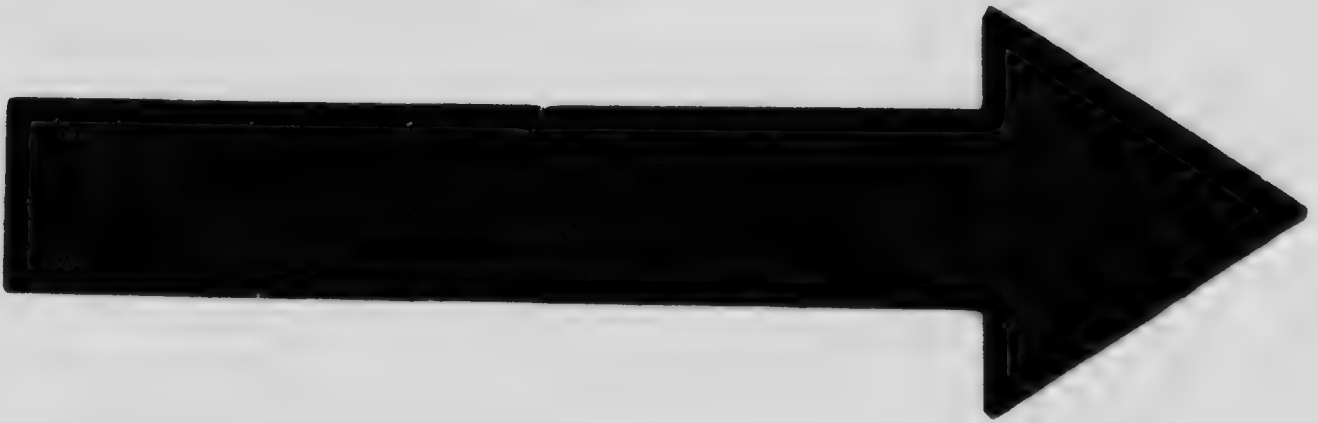
"It's the best claret jug," she said; "the cut one with the oak-leaf mounts. I was going to wash it, and it slipped clean out of my hands. If it had been the other one I wouldn't have cared so much."

"You imagine you wouldn't, but you would," he said. "I never saw such a worrier as you are. One would think your sticks and chattels were the children you haven't got!"

"It was such a beautiful pattern," she murmured, harping grievously upon her theme.

"D—n the claret jug!" said Tregenna. "Leave off making a fool of yourself and get me my dinner. Why isn't the table laid?"

In her agitation she had actually overlooked the approach of



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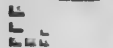
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one o'clock, and will it believed that none of those foolish girls had had the sense to remind her of it! Here was another discord in the domestic harmony. John liked his meals punctual to the minute, and would be put out for the rest of the day. She had often noticed that when one thing went wrong everything went wrong. It was very trying.

She hurried the parlour-maid to such an extent while the table was being laid that another accident happened—with a tumbler this time. And her doleful frame of mind was justified, when dinner was ready at last, by John's ill temper. He complained about the mutton, which was certainly a little tough, and growled without any justification whatever at the pudding.

"You're no housekeeper," he said. "You fuss and fuss, but the result's nothing. You make a point of saving five pounds a year upon the cook's wages, with your precious notions of economy, and the result is that we never get a dish fit to eat. The fact is, you can't rise above your origin. You're still the poor man's daughter. You're very well in a pokey little cottage, where you can muddle round and do all the work yourself, but you don't understand the management of a gentleman's household, and never will."

"I don't know that I ever pretended to be a lady," said Prudence, with a painful quiver of her pale, dry lips. "You thought me good enough when you married me, John."

"I was a fool—like all young men," growled Tregenna. "I always meant to get on, and I might have known that I *should* get on. I ought to have waited a bit. You were older than me, and you hooked me, that's a fact."

"I'm sure I've been a good wife to you," she murmured. "You wouldn't find many who'd look after things as I do. There isn't a cleaner house in St Ruth—or in the county either."

He stirred irritably on his chair.

"There you go—the house, the nouse, the house! You can't get it into your dull brain that it isn't a general servant that's wanted. I've got out of the rut I began in; why don't you? If you'd the gumption of some women you'd be next door to a lady by this time, sewing fancy work in the drawing-room and

entertaining your betters, instead of grubbing about the house. There's ever so many people I want to ask home, but what's the use of trying it on with a hostess like you? You'd give the other women the jumps with your dowdy gowns and your broken finger-nail! . . . However, it's no good trying to ram sense into *your* head!"

"I'm sure I do my best," said Prudence, "and nobody can do more. I didn't know you were so fond of company. I'll see about getting a new dress made, and we'll give a party if you like."

"Oh, don't trouble yourself," he said roughly. "I should be in a hot bath all night for fear of what you were going to say next. Your words aren't pearls, my dear. Besides, who'd come to see *you*?"

"Rachel Garth comes," said Prudence, "and she's a lady."

"Ay; she drops in to take a cup of tea, as she'd drop in to tea with one of the cottagers," replied the man, hitting the nail on the head with bitter perception. "She's so much the lady that she isn't afraid of being confounded with *your* sort. I saw her making toast at old Sarah Couche's one day—she'd brought the tea herself, a pound packet. That isn't quite the same as putting on a low-necked dress and coming to dinner to meet our friends. Ah, I might have married a girl like that if I'd had the sense to wait."

The patient worm turned then. The patches of colour which meant anger with her came into her cheeks, and she crumbled her bread as though she did not know what she was doing.

"Oh, I knew what you was thinkin' of; you needn't 'ave said it!" she exclaimed. "I may be a fool, but I am not such a fool as to be blind to the comparisons which are made. I've seen you looking at her. She's pretty, and sweet, and fine-mannered and a lady,—oh, I've got nothin' against her!—and I'm on'y the wife who's worked her life away for you. It's always the same. A woman never gets no gratitude."

He stared at her, a little taken aback, and pushed away his plate and rose.

"It seems to me you've got precious little to complain about," he said.

"I ain't complainin'. I know you've been out of temper the last week, because she's been away, and you don't always think of what you're saying. She's back now; I saw her pass this morning. So perhaps you'll begin to feel better!"

She had never answered him like that before. He had not credited her with the intelligence to perceive his infatuation for Rachel Garth, much less with the spirit to resent it. He was as much surprised and outraged as though the dog which had always licked his hand had bitten him.

His eyes flashed fire, a flush of passion overspread his face. He raised his hand to strike her, but thought better of it, and controlled himself in time.

"I shall murder you one day, that'll be the end of it," he muttered, and strode out of the room.

Prudence began to cry directly he had gone, not passionately—she was incapable of passion—but feebly, helplessly, miserably. Perhaps until she had spoken she had not believed her own suspicions. She did not understand now how she had dared to utter them. She wished he had denied it, if only to show that he did care for her a bit. She was not afraid of Rachel; she did not believe the girl had encouraged him, and bore her no malice; but any woman, however meek, would resent her husband's open admiration of another woman.

Through the lace curtains she could see him standing at the gate. He filled his pipe and lighted it as though nothing were the matter. It struck her for the first time, strangely enough, that he had no feeling—that he was a hard man. He admired Rachel Garth, but perhaps if he had married her fifteen years ago, and watched her grow old, he would have become unkind to her too. She could not help it if she were no longer young and pretty, and he need not have thrown her lack of children in her face. He had never mentioned that before. It gave her something new to fret over. She wondered if he had only said it on the spur of the moment to aggravate her, or whether he had been brooding over it on the quiet. He did not seem to notice children, but a man who snubs other people's brats likes his own. Perhaps if he had had a boy he would have been fonder of her. It was just his luck. She cried again.

Tregenna left the gate, and walked down the road. He was an indefatigable worker; it was the only way to get on; and, well off as he was now, he meant to be a very rich man before he had done. If the master stayed away from the works other people idled too, and everybody in his employ had to earn his wages. Despite his growing fortune, and the power and importance it gave him, the mine owner was sullen and out of sorts this afternoon. It was true, as Prudence had stated, that he had been in a bad temper for a week. His passion for Rachel had reached fever heat, and her absence from home had been almost more than he could bear. Denied the feeble consolation of seeing her, his black mood had culminated at dinner-time. His wife could always exasperate him. He was not an educated man himself, certainly not a refined man, but she was a fool. He despised her weakness, her patience, her industry, although his domineering will would not have permitted the existence of another will under his roof. Her stupid, drab face irritated him; her inability to grasp an idea unconnected with household matters; the petty grievances with which she greeted him at meals; the very way in which she parted her hair in the middle, and plastered it down tight on each side of her head. He hated the old elastic-sprung boots she wore in the house and the way she wiped her nose!

If he had only waited! He had always been ambitious; he had always intended to wait. But she was older than he. Yes, she had caught him. He forgot how much he had wanted her at the time, and put all the blame on her. If he were free now he might marry a woman who would help him instead of holding him back. He would never be recognised by the gentry with such a wife. And he was still young—a man in the prime of mental and bodily vigour—and she was getting old. He did not see her many good qualities or thank her for her devotion to him. She was an incubus. She had no tact, no adaptability, no idea of improving herself in any way. In the last few years he had bought books and read them in order to inform himself on those subjects which interested him: histories and political works, and the biographies of great men. And on his visits to London he had gone to picture galleries—not that he cared for pictures—

and to a concert or two, and to the play. He had learned a great deal, in fact, and could talk about most things practical men talk about without making a fool of himself. But one might as well try to hold an intelligent conversation with the cook as with his wife.

In a way he was to be pitied, for he genuinely pitied himself. In contrast with Prudence he saw Rachel Garth—Rachel, his ideal of feminine grace and beauty. The spice of the unusual in her fascinated him—the set of her head, her sombre black eyes, which flashed like black diamonds when she was excited, the whiteness of her well-kept hands, and all her little tricks of self-adornment, like the bit of old lace at her throat and the buckles on her high-heeled shoes. She was young, and her freshness charmed him; she was refined, and the man who had no refinement himself appreciated it all the more in her. She had the bloom of the flower which no rough hand had touched. Prudence was earthenware, and Rachel was dainty, fragile china.

The "Talk o' the Vale" lay about half-a-mile off to the southwest, and to reach it Tregenna had to pass the junction of the cross-roads which lead to Craddoc on the one hand and Carnruan on the other.

His pipe was not drawing satisfactorily, and, pausing by the sign-post, he caught sight of a female figure ahead of him on the Carnruan Road. It was a girlish figure, slim and tall, with undulating gait, and Tregenna would have recognised it farther off: Rachel Garth returning from one of her errands of charity—Rachel, alone.

The road was solitary at this point. For a good two miles there were no houses at all. It ran through wild and desolate country, which was scarcely fit for grazing ground, and in half-a-mile dipped deep into a gorge which bisected a disused slate quarry. Here there was only just room enough for the road, and the little brook bubbling over the stones at the side of it, between the walls of piled-up debris from the quarry. Great masses of natural rock, which acted as piers to safeguard the stability of the refuse, jutted out overhead, darkening the brightest summer day, and tiny rills of water flowed down through the bracken and gorse to join the brook and hurry to the sea.

The place might be beautiful when all the broken slate was overgrown with vegetation ; at present it was only gloomy and wild, fit scene for a crime. One could imagine a murder taking place at this desolate turn of a desolate road, which seemed hidden from God as well as from man.

Nevertheless, Rachel continued her homeward way leisurely. She was not a timid girl, and it had never occurred to her in her life that the lane through the slate quarry was a place to avoid. She was used to walking about alone ; she was used to the country, and to the people, most of whom were known to her by name, and what was there to fear ? It made her much more nervous to cross a London street than to take a ten-mile walk around her home.

She went on soberly. There was a time when she used to sing to herself, but that seemed long ago to her now. Her love for Vivian Carew had left a wound in her heart which would never entirely heal, and it was always of him she thought when alone.

Tregenna stood watching her, his pipe forgotten in his hand. He saw her stop presently and stoop to pick a flower from the wayside, and another farther on. His business lay in the opposite direction, but still he hesitated at the cross-roads. The colour in his cheeks deepened. He cast a careful glance in every direction. There was nobody in sight except Rachel.

He put his pipe away, and followed her.

CHAPTER XIII

A ROUGH ENCOUNTER AND ITS SEQUEL

TREGENNA came up to the girl just as she was entering the gorge. She looked round before he spoke, and, either in his fancy or in reality, her face darkened a little.

"Oh, Mr Tregenna, is it you ?"

"How do you do ?" he said. "I hope you are glad to see me ?"

His tone was a little offensive, but she took no notice of it, and he began to walk beside her.

"Are you going to Carnruan?" she asked.

"I wasn't thinking about it till I caught sight of you. I'll walk a bit of the way with you. Perhaps you don't want me?"

"I didn't say so, Mr Tregenna."

"But you looked it. You think I'm pretty cool, I suppose! I've come to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be too diffident in this world. The man who takes a back seat of his own accord is never offered a front one. I see you've been picking wild flowers. Will you give me one for my button-hole?"

The girl's black brows contracted; she was not patient; she was not Prudence. Perhaps that was why he liked her so much—for that spice of passion in her eyes.

"There are plenty more by the roadside, Mr Tregenna, if you choose to pick one for yourself."

"I want one that you have touched," he said bluntly. "I don't care a rap for the flowers themselves. Come, don't be unkind!"

He held out his hand for the gift she was reluctant to bestow. His insistence seemed to compel her despite herself. She hesitated, but selected a few late violets from her bouquet at last and gave them to him.

"That's a good girl," he said. "I shall always treasure them, in memory of this day and you. There's a pretty speech! A real gentleman couldn't have said fairer than that! Don't you forget me at Carnruan? A girl like you ought to be having a few admirers, and lots of lovers. Wouldn't you like to marry a rich man? He could give you all you wanted?"

"I shouldn't like to marry a man I didn't care for," replied Rachel coldly.

"Now you're offended!" he said. "The conversation doesn't please you. What shall we talk about?"

"I am not anxious to talk at all," she said in a rage.

"In other words, you want to get rid of me! What have I done," he said in a low tone, "to make you hate me? I wish you'd tell me how to please you, Rachel."

He put his arm round her waist as he spoke.

She stopped instantly, her face flaming, and repulsed him with an anger which almost choked her voice.

"How dare you!" she exclaimed. "This insolence is too much. I will never speak to you again. Kindly leave me at once!"

"My touch won't poison you," he said, "and I'm not going yet. Did you think I'd followed you just to look at you? I've had to hold myself pretty tight lately. You've snubbed me again and again, but that don't make much difference to a man who is as fond of a girl as I am of you. I'd go on my knees to you if you'd give me a kiss."

She seemed to realise suddenly that the road was desolate, and that if she screamed no one would hear. Fear drove the angry colour from her cheeks, and her heart was beating fast. This was a most unpleasant experience, one which she had never had before. She wished she were at home; she prayed for somebody to come along; but the terrified glance she cast up and down the road discovered no living thing except a blackbird pecking at a worm.

"What would your wife say?" she cried desperately. "I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself."

"Do you think I'm afraid of Prudence?" He laughed derisively. "No more than I am of you, my dear. She knows I'm in love with you. We had a row about it at dinner-time. You owe me something, you see! I won't tell if you'll let me kiss you."

He advanced again, and she saw in the man's eyes at that moment what a brute he was and how far he would go with this mood on him. He laid his big hands on her shoulders and bent towards her. His breath mingled with her breath, his face within half-a-foot of hers.

"I'll let you go if you'll give me just one kiss," he said, "and your word to tell nobody. I don't want to be rough, but I must have something to live on."

She could not bear it. His touch made her creep. She raised her open hand, and slapped his face with all her might. She was stronger than she looked—wiry if slim—and Tregenna gave a gasp of astonishment and released her.

"You little spitfire!"

"Let me alone!" gasped the girl. "Let me alone!"

The mark of her five fingers was crimson on his cheek. By-and-by it would be a bruise, no doubt. It stung; it stung even deeper than she knew. He was both sullen and passionate, and his enormous strength had helped to make him impatient of the least opposition, much more of a blow. That he, John Tregenna, should be struck! If she had been a man he would have knocked her down, and trampled her out of the least vestige of humanity.

As it was he stood gazing at her, his teeth grinding, his face pale with fury.

"Oh, you shall pay for this!"

"You deserved it. You are a coward!"

"You shall beg my pardon on your knees!"

"I will tell my brothers how you have treated me," said Rachel with spirit.

"Which one will you tell—Stephen?" He shook in grim, silent mirth. "Oh, I shouldn't tell Stephen, if I were you. He wouldn't like to quarrel with me."

"He is afraid of nobody," she said. "If he were here he would soon put you in your place." She sobbed suddenly, locking her hands. "Oh, I wish he were here!"

"He'd know better than to quarrel with a man who could ruin him."

"*You* could ruin him?" she repeated disdainfully. "What nonsense!"

"If I had chosen to tell what I knew about him he would be in gaol at this moment. I held my tongue for your sake; but a man wants some reward for what he does—something better than a slap in the face! If I am to remain mum you must change your tune, my girl, and thank your stars that I am still willing to be friends."

Her heart sank. She could not believe it was really in his power to harm Stephen; nevertheless, the assurance of his tone alarmed her. He was not at all respectful to-day; he was not ashamed of his impertinence; instead of apologising he threatened. The excuses he had found for his behaviour on the evening he called at The Haven no longer seemed credible. She did not think he had been drinking; his manner was equally unpleasant

anyhow. To be alone with him on a deserted road was very different from confronting him in her own home.

"You are trying to make me uneasy about Stephen, but you can't," she said. "It is rather cheap to try, isn't it? I am not likely to believe anything you say."

"Aren't you? You'll believe me when you see him in the dock! He is a scoundrel—a damned scoundrel and a hypocrite. You think so much of him! I'll open your eyes for you. It was he, not Vivian Carew, who murdered Joe Williams."

For a moment she was too taken aback to speak. That he should dare to level such an accusation against Stephen, of all men, cast all his former insolence in the shade.

"It's a lie!" she retorted hotly.

"No; it's God's truth. I was walking on the cliffs that night, and I saw what happened with my own eyes."

"It's a lie!" repeated Rachel. "Do you think that anyone—*anyone* could convince me that my brother had done such a thing? If you had seen what you say you would have come forward when Mr Vivian Carew was arrested."

"Don't you remember that evening I came to The Haven," he asked, "to see your brother? I was going to talk to him about this business then, and ask him what he meant to do. But he was away, over at the Island, and I saw you instead. You thought me impertinent; you almost ordered me out of the house. It was then I made up my mind to keep my secret until it suited me to give it away. I saw I should need a hold over you—and I've got my dear! I'm sorry for Carew, but what's he to me? It's you I'm thinking about every hour of my life. Are we to be friends—or not?"

"You have invented this ridiculous story," said Rachel.

"All the same it's my dear! It looks pretty whitewashed, my dear! You may take my word for it that it's true, or you may prove I am a liar if you like."

"I would not insult my brother by asking him a single question on the subject!"

"It's foolish to talk like that," he said. "I tell you once again it's true, so you'd better make up your mind what terms you are going to be on with me."

"What terms?" she queried blankly.

"Yes," he said, looking her in the eyes. "Half measures won't suit me any longer. It's got to be all or nothing. And nothing means that I go straight to the police and split on Stephen Garth."

"I don't know why you look at me like that," said the girl, with a sort of breathlessness. "I don't know what you mean. You can't expect me to speak to you again after to-day. You can't frighten me about Stephen. He is my brother, he is not a murderer, and you will be punished if you tell lies about him. But you won't do anything; you only say you will. I'm not afraid."

"You'd better think it over—if you care for your precious brother," said Tregenna trimly. "I'll give you a fortnight. At the end of that fortnight I shall call for my answer—and you'd better have an amiable one ready or it will be the worse for him."

He left her then, and she turned homeward. She was horribly upset and shocked. She had taken a dislike to Tregenna before this, but she hated him now. It was impossible that there could be anything in the accusation he levelled at Stephen. Whatever had put it into his head to say such a thing? He must know she would repeat everything, and that he would be called upon to apologise for his damnable conduct.

It was a great relief to reach home. She went straight to her room, and locked the door, and then her agitation found its natural vent.

She sobbed stormily. She was proud and she had a temper of her own. That any man should dare to talk to her as Tregenna had talked! She curled herself up in an arm-chair and glared at the memory of him with fierce, wet eyes. He was a coward, a villain, a brute! She would tell Stephen, and leave him to deal with the fellow.

But she did not tell her mother and Mamie and St John what had happened. It was no good frightening her mother and sister by the repetition of her adventure, and St John was too young to interfere. She regarded him as a boy. He could not

be expected to have Stephen's judgment and knowledge of the world.

She thought she would write to Stephen, but when she sat down with her pen in her hand and the blank sheet of note-paper before her she did not find it so easy to express herself even to her favorite brother. It was difficult to say in cold blood: "This man accuses you of murder, and treachery towards your friend." She did not believe for a moment that there was anything more in it than a clumsy attempt to frighten her, but he might imagine that she did, as she thought it necessary to repeat the accusation. He might reproach her for not ignoring Tregenna entirely, instead of troubling him about it. She wished he were here. A conversation would put everything straight.

His time was so valuable, however, that she did not like to ask him to come down. It would be better for her to go up to London.

She had no fear that Marion would not be glad to see her. They were more than sisters-in-law; they were friends.

With a little trouble she found an excuse for a visit to London good enough to satisfy her mother and Mamie, and arrived in Harley Street the next day.

On the surface no household could have been more enviable. Husband and wife were both young, good-looking, and attractive. Their marriage had been a love match, and Garth's new venture as a consulting physician gave promise of great success.

They took infinite pains to disguise their disunion from Rachel, and, preoccupied with the Tregenna affair, the girl perceived nothing amiss. All she saw was a perfect harmony which it seemed cruel to break with such a jarring note. Stephen's position, his ability, the obvious esteem in which he was held, made the charge seem more and more monstrous. What was the use of annoying him with such nonsense when he had so many important things to think of? She felt a fool for allowing herself to take Tregenna seriously. At the end of the fortnight she would tell the servant that she was "not at home" to Mr Tregenna if he called, and the matter would be at an end. Nevertheless she allowed Marion to persuade her to prolong her visit, which she had only intended to last a day or two, and began to look worried and nervous as the end of the fortnight drew near.

It had occurred to her that Tregenna was not the man to threaten idly. He might be able to annoy Stephen with libels, and if he took to following her about she would be afraid to go out.

On the twelfth day she suddenly resolved to take Marion into her confidence. They were alone with the tea-table between them, and a pause gave her the opening she desired.

"I want to ask your advice, Marion."

"I thought there was something on your mind," said Marion quietly. "That was why you came up, wasn't it?"

"Yes. How clever you are!" The girl embraced her knees with her arms and rocked gently to and fro, her brows levelled and her black eyes bent upon the floor. "I came up to confide something to Stephen, and then I thought I wouldn't, and I've hesitated and hesitated. After all, what is the use of bothering him? Men make such a fuss about some things. You'll be much more sensible."

"What sort of things, Rachel?"

"I've had trouble with John Tregenna. He is in love with me. I had reason to suspect it before, but the other day he waylaid me on the road through the quarry, and—and tried kiss me."

"Rachel!"

"I smacked his face," said Rachel, "and he was furious. He said he would give me a fortnight in which to make up my mind whether I would be friends with him or not. The fortnight elapses the day after to-morrow."

"What insolence, Rachel! Certainly you must tell Stephen. Why, the man is married! What can he mean?"

"I can't make him out," said Rachel in a tone of troubled perplexity. "He must consider me a fool, or worse, or he must drink. But I can't think he was drunk that day. He says he can ruin Stephen, and only holds his tongue for my sake. Marion, he actually dares to say it was Stephen who murdered Joe Williams—that he was near and saw what occurred! Did you ever hear such a thing? I nearly choked with mingled rage and fright."

The silence lasted so long that she looked up at last. Marion sat in her chair rigid, her face as white as death.

"Marion, Marion, what is the matter?"

"You must not quarrel with John Tregenna, Rachel, if you can possibly avoid it. You will need a great deal of tact."

They looked into each other's eyes while the clock ticked thirty times. A wild cry broke from Rachel's lips.

"It is impossible! Speak to me, Marion! Oh, speak to me!"

CHAPTER XIV

RACHEL IS "SENSIBLE"

"AREN'T you coming out to finish your sketch?" asked Mamie.

"No," said Rachel; "not to-day."

"What *are* you going to do?"

"There's plenty of mending."

Mamie planted herself in front of Rachel, and fixed a suspicious gaze upon her face.

"You are not—not brooding, are you?" she asked.

"What do you mean?" said Rachel, flushing.

The younger girl grew still redder. It was positive agony to her to talk what she called "sentiment."

"You've been so quiet since you came home," she said.

"My dear Mamie, I only returned yesterday."

"And you made an awfully vapid excuse for going up to London," persisted Mamie doggedly. "Did you imagine you took *me* in with your talk about a new dress? I suppose you can't rest at home now. Everything reminds you of Vivian."

"Naturally," said Rachel in a low tone, "I have not forgotten. But I did not mean to be depressing."

"Who said you were?" Mamie gasped, and suddenly hugged her sister.

"You're a poor dear! There, I'm going out. Want anything in the village?"

"No, thank you. Where are you off to?"

"Oh, just for a walk," said Mamie, with an air of evasiveness, "and perhaps for an hour's sail in Mr Wetherby's boat. He said he might be down at the Cove by four o'clock."

Rachel smiled, but she soon grew serious when Mamie had gone. She had persuaded her mother to pay an afternoon call at the Vicarage in order to have the house to herself if Tregenna should come. Her point of view had changed since she went up to London, and Marion's words were engraved upon her memory: "You must not quarrel with John Tregenna, Rachel, if you can possibly avoid it. You will need a great deal of tact."

Yes, certainly she would need a great deal of tact. The girl's black eyes stared out of the window at the daisies on the grass. It was to be her mission in life, it seemed, to sacrifice the man she loved to her brother. She knew now what she had always believed—that Vivian was innocent. But she was obliged, like Marion, to keep Stephen's secret. It was as impossible for his sister to betray him as for his wife. Marion had told her everything, and her lips were locked. To be loyal to one's own blood was a matter of course. Vivian was her lover, but she could only pray for him.

Unfortunately, she could find no consolation in prayer. She was half wild with grief over both these men, whom she loved in different ways—the innocent and the guilty. Her highly strung temperament, as different from Marion's as a rushing, foaming river from a deep, still lake, displayed itself in her over-brilliant eyes, the feverish flushing and paling of her cheeks, her hot and nervous hands. She had scarcely slept since Marion had told her, and her violent, stormy weeping had left her tearless this afternoon.

Every time footsteps approached the gate she thought it was Tregenna, and her face showed the welcome she had for him. She could no longer persuade herself that his threats had been invented to frighten her and would die a natural death. His story was true, or true enough to make him dangerous if he chose to be so.

Her pose was almost tragic as she sat at the window waiting. Only a few months ago she had watched at the same window for Stephen to come home. The contrast between her own feelings then and now sent a shiver through her frame.

She calculated she had a clear two hours before her. Neither her mother nor Mamie were likely to be home before six, and

Tregenna's calls were usually made between four and five o'clock. It would be easier to deal with him, she felt, if she were not afraid of being overheard.

Each moment of suspense preyed upon her nerves. She wanted him to come now, and get the interview over, although what the result of it would be she could not imagine. For Stephen's sake she must keep her wits about her. If she could sacrifice Vivian to him she must not spoil everything by a quarrel with this man.

When the gate clanged at last her heart stood still. It was really Tregenna. There was a geranium in his button-hole, and his clothes—a suit of tweed—looked suspiciously new.

She heard him ring and ask for her, and then the servant coming to the door. All the phrases she had rehearsed vanished at once, and her mind became a blank. Her position was so "cheap"; she had defied him, and she was obliged to meet him humbly, and swallow her own words. The humiliation of it nearly choked her, and she stood before him white to the lips and quivering with rage and fear.

"How do you do, Miss Rachel?" he said. "I hear you have been to London. So you wanted a talk with Dr Garth, although you did not believe a word I said!"

"I did not as much as mention your name to Dr Garth," she said.

"Then why did you fly up to London? You are going to shake hands, aren't you?"

She hesitated, despite herself, the blood rushing to her face; then she gave him her hand. He took it in both his own and pressed it, and a look of eager passion lighted his face.

"Rachel!" he said thickly. "Rachel! Then we are to be friends?"

"Friends—yes," she said, repeating the words with emphasis. "But you need not imagine my brother knows anything or that I pay the least attention to your story about him. It is only that I—I do not wish him to be worried—annoyed just as he is getting on so well, and—and——"

"I may have the kiss you wouldn't give me the other day?"

"Oh, that's quite different!" she said. "The other day you

were excited—we were both a little excited. I am sure you are in a more reasonable frame of mind this afternoon, and will not ask me to do anything wrong."

He looked at her queerly.

"Is a kiss such a shocking affair?"

"You know it wouldn't be right between you and me, Mr Tregenna. You are a married man."

"If I weren't married, would you kiss me?" inquired Tregenna.

"Please don't ask me such questions."

"But I want to know," he said. "I want to know whether you are hanging back because you don't think it proper to come forward or because you don't like me?"

"I shall like you very much," said Rachel, "if you are kind to me."

"Lord," he said, "I'd do anything for you in the world, my dear; you may be sure of that. I love every hair of your head."

"Then show it," said the girl quickly, "by treating me with respect."

Once more he seemed taken aback. Perhaps he felt the tension at which she faced him, coarse grained as he was, and admired her spirit if he could not afford to pity her.

"Look here," he said roughly, "I thought you understood me the other day. If you reckon I'll be satisfied to come here once a fortnight and drink a cup o' tea with your mother and sister, you're wrong, my girl. I want a friend who's a real friend—a companion. I'm sick of being shut up at home with Prudence; I forget how to speak. I thought we'd walk out of evenings when I get away from the mine, and take a drive sometimes, and even a trip to Plymouth, and enjoy ourselves."

"Enjoy ourselves!" she repeated, with a hysterical gulp.

"Of course," said Tregenna, "we'd keep it quiet. There need be no talk."

"It is impossible," she said. "What would my mother say? We should be seen, and she would be bound to hear of it."

"You are putting me off again!"

"I can't think why you care for me," she said miserably. "We have nothing in common."

"I've got eyes like other men," he said, "and you are pretty. I never saw a prettier girl than you."

"I am sure there are heaps better looking," she said, depreciating herself with pitiful eagerness. "There is the old bellringer's daughter, and Elsie Permewan in your own village, and—and dozens of others that I could name."

"You know very well that none of them come up to you," he said. "But it don't matter about others. It is you and you only that I've been thinking about this six months past. I remember well the first time we spoke together—do you? It was at that charity bazaar affair at the Vicarage here. They'd worried me to go, because I could afford to spend a ten-pound note. They ain't so anxious to ask me to their private parties, I notice! You were selling flowers, and you offered me a button-hole. It was a pink rose, and I gave you a guinea for it, and you smiled at me."

His voice had softened as much as it was capable of softening, and her lids drooped as though his unexpected pathos had struck a chord in her which vibrated despite herself. She knew at this moment that it was no passing passion, but the devotion of a lifetime she had won. If he had been single she would have pitied him so much. If she could have dismissed him with a look of sorrow, a friend's pressure of the hand, she would have pitied him, woman-like, for loving her without hope. But he threatened her, he frightened her; he had been rude and rough the other day.

She set her teeth, and hardened her heart to his sentimental reminiscences. She turned her gaze to the window as though he could not bear it to rest upon his face. That he should talk to her as lovers talk was the last insult a married man could offer to a woman. The faint lingering trace her hand had left upon his cheek should have reminded him, if he needed reminding, to what resentment his conduct aroused her.

"I remember the bazaar," she said. "Does it matter? I sold other roses."

"You struck me then," he said. "I had only out

of doors before. You were dressed in blue, and your eyes looked as dark as night, and your hand—your hand was so white as you pinned in the rose!"

Rachel yawned, with the air of the greatest weariness she could assume.

"You don't want to know what I thought of you then and what I think of you now?" he said bitterly.

"No," she said. "Because you had no right to think of me then and because you have no right to think of me now!"

"If I weren't married," he said, "you could not answer me like this. Good Lord, why did I tie a millstone round my neck? The man who marries at twenty-two is mad!"

"Are you sure it would make much difference to you if you were free?" she asked. "Don't regret poor Prudence. She loves you."

"And she's such a charming, lovely wife for a man to go home to when he's tired, ain't she?" he said with savage sarcasm. "Her complexion's so beautiful, and her hair's so pretty, and her figure's so good. Ugh!"

"She loves you," repeated Rachel, "and she thinks of nothing in the world but your interests and welfare. No man could have a better wife. I wonder you are not ashamed to be so ungrateful."

"I am not ashamed," he said, and he stretched out his hand to her once more, not rudely—tentatively, pleadingly. "Can a man help his nature? She's grown old; I'm still young; and after working all these years, and thinking of naught else, I've suddenly got awake to the fact that my life's slipping away, and I'm getting nothin' out of it. I love you, and I can't help telling you so. Lord knows I'd do anything in the world to make things comfortable all round."

"Then think no more about me, and be kind to Prudence, and—and I will forgive you for trying to frighten me about my brother."

"That's a poor reward for a big sacrifice, Rachel."

"What is your sacrifice? You are already married; I cannot marry you!"

His sullenness grew again—the brutal expression of mouth and eyes.

"Yes, you are trying to put me off, to get round me, and make me behave like a great softy. But I'm not such a fool. Will you come to the theatre with me, over at Craddoc, on Saturday night? I'll bring you safe home."

"No," she said.

"Well, will you meet me at the Lover's Cave to-morrow afternoon?"

"No," responded Rachel once more.

"Yes, you will," he said. "It isn't much to ask, I am sure. Just half-an-hour's chat; say at six o'clock."

She was about to refuse again when she saw her mother enter the house.

"You had better say Yes, unless you want the old lady to hear all about it," added Tregenna menacingly.

Rachel quivered with rage.

"Very well," she said, "I will come—but only for half-an-hour."

"There's a sensible girl," he said. "Bless your heart, I see we shall be good friends still!"

CHAPTER XV

THE LOVER'S CAVE

AFTER he had gone she was sorely troubled about her promise, but what else could she have done with her mother at the door? The girl went up to her room, and sat on the broad window seat in the dark. If she lighted the candle Mamie would come in and ask what she was doing—Mamie the irrepressible, who did not know what a heartache meant. And she wanted to be alone. Life had become difficult and dangerous. Wherever she turned there was a pitfall lurking in readiness for her feet.

She longed passionately for Marion. Marion was strong—how strong she had never realised till the other day. With the insight which is half instinct in women she recognised the difference between herself and her sister-in-law. On the wings of excitement she might rise higher than Marion, but how much lower

could she fall ! Her courage fluctuated with her emotion ; it was only passion ; Marion's was the outcome of perfect self-control. Marion was a woman of will ; she was a woman of moods.

A nervous headache was stealing upon her. She took the pins out of her hair and shook it loose in a black cloud over her neck and shoulders. Then she crouched closer to the casement, and hugged herself in her arms, and cried. She had managed so badly after all. This interview with Tregenna ought to have been the last, and instead there was another before her, making to-morrow a day of dread. She wanted somebody's advice, but there was no time to write to Marion, and there was nobody else to ask. With her mother, less than anyone, could she discuss this affair. She understood now the inner meaning of Stephen's intense and unfaltering consideration for their mother, of the anxiety he had shown, even from boyhood, to save her the least trouble of any kind. The summer of her life had been a hard one ; its autumn should be passed in peace. To spread the secret would only be to spread misery ; and the girl was not selfish. Besides, she had promised Marion to tell no one.

She heard the clock strike the hours through half the night. She was feverish. Her dark head tossed from side to side ; she flung her hands outside the bed-clothes, and wished she had not cried so much to make her eyes smart. Once she rose, and walked the room because she was tired of lying and thinking ; her feet paced the carpet till they were chilled and her slim body shivered ; and dawn, looking through the blind, showed her to herself witch-like in the glass.

She put a new piece of ribbon round her hat, and dressed herself becomingly to meet Tregenna. The monster must be tamed. He loved her ; it should not be impossible to keep him in his place. If only she were not so nervous ! When she lost command over herself it was useless to expect to command him.

Yes, the monster must be tamed, and the process could only be one of kindness ; nevertheless, she despised herself for the little unusual adornments which suggested that it was a lover she was going to meet. Her black eyes gazed passionately at their reflection until tears came, which she blinked away as fiercely. It was

useless to behave like a fool. The part she had to play was that of a clever woman of the world.

She did not keep to the footpath on her way to the cave, but struck across the down. The short turf was springy to tread upon, and there was a sparkle in the air. She threw her shoulders back with an unconscious gesture of virility. She was young after all. Perhaps something would happen to put things straight. If Vivian were to get abroad safely, and make enough money to marry on, she might be able to atone a little for the wrong Stephen had done him. He need not be alone, at anyrate, and unloved.

For an instant she stood on the top of the cliff looking down on the sea, then fearlessly descended the steep, narrow path. It led directly to the landward entrance of the Lover's Cave, through which was visible, as through a telescope, a rounded glimpse of land and sky. The place was large, and dark in the corners where the sun could never penetrate. The carpet of soft sand was strewn with rocks, and a line of shells and weed marked the limits of high tide.

Rachel went down to the mouth of the cave and seated herself on the rim of rocks which formed the basin of the Witches' Cauldron. It was like a well—a well half empty this evening. As the tide rose the cauldron filled from below, boiling through the unseen fissures in the rock with an effect which seemed uncanny even to the intelligent mind.

She picked up a little white pebble and dropped it in. This was a mystic rite with which every Cornish-bred girl was acquainted. If the pebble came up again she who had cast it in would gain her heart's desire; if it sank "he" would never be hers.

Rachel's pebble disappeared at once. To be candid, it was usually the case, causing many hours of woe to youthful believers. Rachel only turned away impatiently, and drew on the sand with the tip of her shoe.

The sun was sinking, and the shadows which lurked all day in the cavernous roof and mysterious corners were creeping towards her on every side. The place began to chill her blood. It was so quiet, so solitary. The sea moaned among the rocks, creeping

up and up. A sudden terror seized her. She was sorry she had come. Tregenna had not behaved so well on the road that day that she should repose such confidence in him. Why had he chosen the cave of all places for their meeting? Her heart beat faster and faster. She would rather finish their talk on the top of the cliff! But it was too late to escape. A man coughed, and the shingle crunched under a heavy step at the only outlet, which was behind her.

It was John Tregenna sure enough. In a moment his bull head and broad shoulders were outlined against the fading light at the entrance of the cave. He could not see the girl at once, and stood peering into the shadow.

"Is anybody there?"

His powerful voice rolled and echoed through the cave in a way which somehow suggested lack of imagination, of reverence, the whole character of the man. One could picture him as loud and unimpressed by a cathedral, although habit might have reminded him to remove his hat.

Rachel rose.

"Here I am. I kept my word, you see."

"You are a good girl," he said, coming forward. "I am sorry to be a few minutes late. A man who had come to see me would not go. I have done a splendid stroke of business to-day, Rachel!"

"I am glad to hear it," she replied indifferently.

It was evident that he was on good terms with himself and the world. His face was red and radiant with success; prosperity exuded from the diamond horse shoe in his tie and his thick gold watch chain.

"You might say you're glad to see me too—even if you're not! I've got something to propose this evening. I don't want any talk to make you unhappy. You shall make me a promise and in return I won't press my company on you before the proper time. If I should be free in a reasonable time, say in a year, would you marry me?"

She stared at him in blank surprise.

"Answer!" he said, his voice hoarse with eagerness, and seized her hand. "If I were free now I'd ask you to marry me next

week, but this is all I can do to be fair—to be fair to both of us. Will you promise?"

"Why should you be free in a year? Mrs. Magenna is not ill, is she?"

"She's not over-strong."

"But there is nothing organically wrong with her—no disease?"

"Not that I know of; I just want to make sure of you *in case* she should die. If she don't, all the better for you, I suppose you think!"

She could tell by the tremor of his voice how anxious he was for her consent. It was very strange that he should think it worth while to extract such a promise from her. Surely Prudence would have told her if she were ill?

It seemed a cheap way of securing Still Rachel hesi-
tated. He seemed so anxious, he made much of it, that he must have some hope in his mind. tated. He seemed so anxious, he made much of it, that he
must have some hope in his mind. must have some hope in his mind. he mean mischief to
Prudence? Surely he would not dare—

"I won't promise," she said tensely.

"But you must!" he said. "I'm tired of this shilly-shallying. You've got to promise."

"And if I don't?"

"I told you once before; I shall split on Dr. Stephen!"

"You know nothing," she said defiantly. "There's nothing to know. Who would believe you?"

"You'll see," he responded.

"I can't make you such a promise, Mr. Stephen. I wouldn't be right during your wife's lifetime."

"I've only got one price for my silence," he said doggedly, "and you know it now."

In after years she could remember exactly how the face of the cliff looked behind the cave and how a little trickle of water was dribbling down the rock beside her. A small green crab scuttled away from her feet into a shallow pool and hid himself; she rather envied that little crab. The tide was rising, and a strange gurgle like a sob came from the Witches' Cauldron.

The girl's eyes grew wider and wider, and darker, with perplexity and fear.

"I can't promise," she repeated, as dogged as he. "Why do

you propose such a thing? It sounds—it sounds,” she whispered breathlessly, “as though you wished her dead.”

Tregenna burst into a hoarse laugh. It was not particularly mirthful; perhaps it let off steam and saved him from suffocation.

“So I do!” he said. “But things don’t happen just because one wishes for them.”

A whimsical mood, which frightened her as much as his passion, caught hold of him—or it may have been intended to divert her attention from a dangerous train of thought.

“D’ye see all those letters scratched on that smooth bit of rock over there? They’re lovers’ names and initials; you know that, don’t you? When I was courtin’ Prudence years ago I wrote hers and mine one Sunday morning! We’ll have ours there too—here, look! over the old one. Come and see.”

“I don’t want to see!” cried Rachel passionately. “I won’t have my initials bracketed with yours!”

He had his pen-knife out and open, but shut it up after all and put it away again.

“You’re too proud, my dear,” he said, “and pride goes before a fall. But we’ll save the letters for another day as it is beginning to get dark. Are you ready with that promise yet, or are you coming to the police station with me to tell about your brother?”

“I won’t promise,” she repeated once more.

She felt indeed that she could not do it even for Stephen’s sake as though she would be committing a crime to do so, but her heart was beating very fast.

“So you are going to let Stephen slide, are you?” he said slowly. “That’s not very sisterly of you.”

The girl remained silent, facing him, her hands clenched, every muscle of her slender body tense.

“I shall have to find another sort of persuasion, then.”

“You can’t!” she said with a pant of defiance.

“Can’t I? We shall see. You don’t leave this place until you promise.”

“You would keep me here by force?”

“That’s it, my dear.”

“You are bragging!” she gasped, very white. “You daren’t.”

“Oh, there isn’t much I daren’t do! You’d better promise.”

"Never—never!"

He made a movement towards her. She backed, her eyes glowing like a cat's in the gloom.

"If you touch me," she said, "I'll scream so loudly that they'll hear me at the coastguard station."

"Scream away," he said. "Your voice won't carry fifty yards out of this cave."

She backed again till the salt water wetted her feet. He followed her. She stepped up to her ankles in the sea.

He put out a rough hand and gripped her by the wrist.

"Don't be a fool," he said. "What are you doing? Do you want to drown yourself?"

"I don't care. Let me go," said Rachel. "I hate you!"

She could not be prudent; she would not make a promise she did not intend to fulfil. He should not have even that much satisfaction if she could help it. Her blood was up. She looked capable of defending herself with tooth and nail.

She struggled silently, frantically, to wrench herself free. Her resistance only had the effect of making him violent. He grasped her other wrist and dragged her out of the water by main force.

"*Now* you shall kiss me!" he said. "It's no good making a fuss. I've got you here. Oh, you'd bite, would you? I can hold both your hands in one of mine, you see, in order to have an arm free to put round your neck!"

She screamed, and for punishment he kissed her several times.

"You beast," she said; "let me go!"

"If you make any more noise I'll gag you with my handkerchief. Are you going to promise?"

"No—yes!" she said, with a convulsive sob.

"That's sensible," he said. "Run away home, then, my dear!"

He kissed her again, and let her go, and she fled like a hare, sobbing all the time, out of the cave and up the path.

Tregenna came to the entrance. The swollen veins on his forehead were dying down. His hands were still a little shaky.

"She's got pluck, by Jove, and spirit!" he muttered. "There's a wife for a man! Her sons wouldn't be weaklings or softies. She'd have gone right into the sea if I hadn't held her fast!"

In the week that followed Rachel saw no more of him. But

she could not forget her promise. Vague as it was, it weighed upon her mind intolerably. The laughter was suddenly checked upon her lips, the smile turned into a sigh, the book she had been reading left forgotten on her lap. Stephen, Vivian, Tregenna! Their lives seemed interwoven with hers. They moved through her brain in continuous procession—the figures of a nightmare which haunted her always. One of them she loved, and one she hated, and the other—the other was Stephen still, her brother; nothing could sever the bond of blood.

She did not tell Marion about Tregenna's bargain; in fact, she only mentioned him briefly once. She wrote that he would not speak, that he had been easier to manage than she had anticipated, and that he was now treating her quite respectfully when they met. Why she had not been candid with Marion she would not admit even to herself, because she was endeavouring to believe that a hideous episode had blown over without leaving any evil trace behind. She would not own that she attached sufficient importance to the extraordinary promise of marriage he had wrung from her to consider it worth repeating, for the very reason that, in her heart of hearts, she dreaded it so much.

If he had been quite a young man, or a man of different class, a different type, she would not have had a moment's uneasiness. Prudence was a woman well under forty years of age: why should she die? But Tregenna was not a poet, a sentimentalist; it would not comfort him to imagine himself engaged to her for a few months. He was the archetype of materialism, and less likely than anyone she knew to act without a motive. He must expect to derive some benefit from this strange bond, or he had wasted his time.

And so she tormented herself, and so she weighed the pros and cons of her case. One day she was sanguine, and could almost smile at her own uneasiness; the next a fit of morbid terror prostrated her nerves.

The result of all this anxiety, which she could confide to no one around her, began to work its natural effect. The girl's health suffered. She had always been thin; she grew thinner. Her pale face became all eyes. She was nervous, irritable, "difficult." A sudden noise made her heart jump, a monotonous

sound or movement distracted her. If Mamie swung her feet or hummed, she hated her. She could not read or work, or even sit still. She had scarcely the patience to live.

Her mother and Mamie thought she was anxious about Vivian, and had every consideration for her, and she did not undeceive them. Of course, she was anxious about him too. Her imagination followed his wanderings wildly on many empty days and wakeful nights. She hoped he was far away from England, and in comparative safety, long ago. Perhaps one day he would write to her, but he had enough to do to take care of himself; he could not protect her. Thank God, he did not know what trouble she was in! Anxiety on her account would only add to his misery. Perhaps by the time she heard from him this complication with Tregenna would be over—unless at the end of the year he insisted upon a renewal of their strange contract. How would it all end? She wandered in the dark, shrinking, afraid.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SECOND BEST

"LET me congratulate you, my dear, on the success of your first big affair," said Mrs Fairfax. "What a perfect hostess you are!"

She was the wife of a bishop—the Bishop of Porthminster—so she ought to have known and she ought to have been sincere. She was correct anyhow. Marion was a perfect hostess. She had the aplomb of a far older woman, although she had been bred in the country. Many young wives would have felt somewhat nervous over so large a gathering, composed, naturally, of many people who were mere acquaintances, and others, Garth's friends and patients, whom she had never even seen before. But she was always graceful and self-possessed, and the right thing to say to everyone seemed to flow from her lips by instinct. Those serene years of cultivation and self-communion which the girl had spent at Poldinnick had made the woman great. As she moved smiling among her guests no one would have guessed that the most miserable heart in the room beat

beneath the rich lace and the diamonds on her breast. She was never artificial; she only kept her sorrows to herself. She was Stephen Garth's wife, and she played her part heroically. To be mistress of his house, the hostess of his guests, preserving appearances, assisting his career with all the social arts of a clever woman, was the mission she had accepted, and she was less likely than anyone to shirk a task or fail in it. In public they talked together as other wives and other husbands; their manner towards each other was so perfect that there was not even a suspicion of the real terms on which they lived. To become a nine days' wonder would have offended her taste as much as his. In their dislike of the vulgarity of a scandal they were one.

But it was rarely that Garth was seen at social functions. He was already becoming a fashionable physician, and his practice had increased with a rapidity which gave him an excellent excuse for refusing most of his numerous invitations. He left all such duties to Marion. He did his share of their mutual life and she did hers. Even to-night, at this, their first large reception, he was absent, much to the disappointment of many friends.

It was growing late, and Marion glanced sometimes at the door in the pauses of conversation. She felt a little weary. It was a strain to simulate for a whole evening the cheerfulness she did not feel. Perhaps she would never have cared for this artificial London life. The woman was made for a cloister, although love of a man had drawn her into the vortex of existence. The sunshine and the fresh air of early morning were so much more attractive to her than electric light, and perfumes, and the glitter of the smart world. She liked simplicity and the scent of flowers—her rooms were banked with them to-night. She was rich, and she spent her money royally, without a word to him, in making the home they shared beautiful and refined.

"I am afraid your husband does not intend to give us the pleasure of seeing him," said Mrs Fairfax.

"He will come," said Marion, "before the evening is over. He promised."

"He may have been called away, my dear."

"Anyhow he will contrive to come, if only for a few minutes," said Marion.

She was absolutely sure that nothing would prevent his doing so. In these days, as ever, he always kept a promise made to her.

"How nice for you to have so reliable a husband," said the Bishop's wife, regarding her kindly. "St John Garth oftens speaks to me about his brother the doctor, and one can see how he loves him. Of course, we all know how splendidly Dr Garth behaved about the small-pox island. He has made his name famous indeed throughout England! There is no man for whom my husband has greater admiration and respect."

"The Bishop is very kind," said Marion.

"We all hope he will continue to rise as he deserves, and that his great talents will meet with every recognition. But you must look after his health, my dear; that is a wife's duty. A man of his energetic temperament thinks he can never overwork himself, although he is peremptory enough, no doubt, in the restrictions he imposes on his patients! So valuable a life as his must not be thrown away. Do not let him work too hard."

"I will remember what you say, Mrs Fairfax," said Marion gravely. "No doubt you are right—though my husband is very strong."

Garth justified her confidence in his word by appearing at that moment. He looked thinner than he was a few months ago. His face was fine drawn, his eyes rather hollow. But his perfect manner had not deserted him. He spoke to his guests with felicitous words of apology and regret, smilingly bemoaning the physician's hard fate, which forbade him even one evening's recreation.

On entering the room his eyes had gone instantly in search of his wife, and he steered his progress towards her.

"Good-evening, Mrs Fairfax. Good-evening, Marion."

The Bishop's wife greeted him warmly; his wife just swept him with a glance and walked away. There was nothing remarkable in her action. It was natural that host and hostess should not simultaneously bestow their attention upon one guest. Only the man knew that she always moved away from him, and that an ocean rolled between her soul and his.

His teeth dented his lip, but he smiled still, and, looking round

his own crowded drawing-rooms after a while, a little of the intoxication of success warmed his chilled blood. He was young, and he had already done so much ! It was something to give a man a good opinion of himself. There were many well-known society people here to-night. He was no snob, and his wife was as well born as any of them. It was what their presence meant which excited him : the worth of it in fame and fortune. At thirty-three years old he was recognised not as a man who was "coming," but as a man who had "come." He had some right, surely, to this thrill of gratified ambition.

His manner, which had been weary when he entered, grew more animated. He flushed a little under a stream of sincere compliments from a quarter not to be disregarded. He was not a machine, but a man, and he was leading an unnatural existence, against which spirit and flesh revolted at moments like this. Other people were happy ! He, who was doing so much for the world, deserved something in return.

His eyes, drawn by the magnetism of another pair of eyes, suddenly met his wife's across the room. She was gazing at him with a faint smile, which froze his lighter mood and sent him shuddering back to the past. The lights, the shimmer of silk and satin, the sparkle of jewels, were wiped out by a kaleidoscope of the lurid scenes which damned him. She did not mean him to forget ; she would not let him forget. This quiet woman, fair and cold and beautiful, this wife he had married but might not touch, stood like the angel of God, in her white robe, shutting him out of Eden with the flaming sword of truth.

He had been no longer than half-an-hour in the room ; nevertheless, he rose and left without the ceremony of wishing anyone good-night. He did not speak to Marion, but she saw him go. She asked no questions. She knew it was not a patient who claimed him at this hour.

It was as a "consumption specialist" that Garth was establishing his reputation, and for some time past he had spent as much of the day as he could spare, and many hours of the night, in his laboratory, where he was engaged upon experiments connected with the cure of the dread disease which he was making his special stud" He had left his laboratory for the drawing-room,

and he returned to it ; she knew that without thinking it necessary to mention the fact. It is so difficult to make the layman understand that every moment of a busy professional life is valuable, and that life itself is too short for science as for art.

Perhaps she envied him the quiet and solitude of his workshop, though not the thoughts he bore away with him. It was a relief when people began to take their leave.

Alone at last, she returned to the larger drawing-room wearily. The flowers were fading, and the rooms, disarranged to hold a number of people, looked desolate in their emptiness.

A sleepy servant glanced in.

"You can go to bed," said Marion. "I will turn out the lights. Is Dr Garth still in his laboratory?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The man thanked her and wished her good-night, and she remained gazing absently at the grate, which only held a bank of blossoms, as though she expected to see there the fire in which she had read her fortune on the evening Garth asked her to be his wife. The husband and the child ! The child !

A wave of colour suffused her face from throat to brow, and faded, leaving her paler than before. Her hands locked suddenly with a gesture of pain. She glanced at the door. Her thoughts had gone back to Garth. He was still up, still working. "You must look after your husband's health, my dear ; that is a wife's duty." The advice was homely and kind, but her position was different from that of other wives. He *must* work, he *must* do his best. For his soul's sake he must sacrifice himself in the cause of that humanity whose laws he had outraged. Confession would be best of all, but second best was the devotion to God's creatures of the labour of his life. Nothing must be begrudged in atonement, not even his strength and health itself. Was she to be the one to spare him—she who ever silently urged him on ? Was she to be the one to place his body before the welfare of his soul ?

"And yet," she murmured, "he looked so tired. Is it cruel ?"

There was a piteous hunger in her face, and her eyes were soft and luminous with the light of unshed tears.

She darkened the rooms, and descended to the laboratory, which was on the entrance floor. Outside the door she paused and listened. He was moving about inside. He sighed, and her hand, as though in answer, sought the handle of the door with a sort of passion. But still she lingered, and still she held herself in check, till the impulse was crushed, and she turned and went sadly up to bed.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SLAVE OF CONSCIENCE

ON the other side of the door which Marion had passed Garth had paused for a moment in his labours to take a turn about the room. The laboratory, built at the back of the house for the sake of a north light, looked dreary in the silence of the night. The floor and walls were bare; there were no curtains to the large windows, no upholstered furniture, not even a rug; only linen blinds, a high stool or two, and in the corner of the room, opposite to the gas stove, a sink and water tap.

The mahogany-topped working bench which ran along the wall beneath the windows was crowded with an immense amount of apparatus: a micro-photographic camera made to rest over the microscope, electric lights, a magnesium ribbon, a hot-air steriliser—like a gas stove; two or three large gallon bottles with siphon attached; a dessicator, thermometer, scale and weights: a spirit level, towel and chamois leather, and other things too numerous to name.

On the shelves against the wall were ranged a hundred or so bottles of various sizes, containing aniline dyes; also nitric, sulphuric, and hydrochloric acids; iodine, ammonia, solution of salt, potash, turpentine, oil of Bergamot, gum, cedar oil, glycerine, ether. A cupboard door, standing ajar, revealed more bottles, glass funnels, glass rods and tubing.

Garth returned to his high stool at the microscope.

Some potatoes were cooking in a steam steriliser—a tall boiler on four legs, with a tap, and a thermometer sticking through the

top. At his elbow were several test-tubes, boxes of gelatine and spermaceti, small glass and porcelain dishes, a knife, a nail brush for cleansing the potatoes, forceps, needles, corks, and thread. At the other end of the bench were strewn many glass vessels, and razors and microtomes for cutting sections for the microscope; also a freezing apparatus for freezing pieces of lung, muscle, etc.

What Garth saw through the microscope was a number of tiny red rods on a blue ground—the terrible bacilli of consumption. Most of them were straight, but some were slightly curved. They were so infinitesimal in size that only a process of colouring, whereby the bacilli were differentiated from the tissues which contained them, rendered them visible through the most powerful microscope. It is the discovery of this colouring process that the world owes to the great Dr Koch—the discovery which made the study of tuberculosis possible for the first time to specialists like Garth. There, under his eyes, was the minute life more vicious than a hungry beast, more deadly than a sword. The human eye could not see them, but their roll of slain swelled and swelled its millions as the years swept on. To stop this slaughter, to stamp out this scourge—God, what a dream for a man who loved his race! He would have sacrificed his ten best years to reach the end he might never attain and present his great gift to the world.

There were moments when success seemed almost near enough to touch; there were other moments when despair seized him, and he could only sigh over a lost hope, a mistake, an illusion dispelled, and begin again. He was dogged in his patience, fierce in his energy, a genius in the passion which drove him back to toil that often seemed a waste of time. For his thought was the woman's thought, which had passed between them with no needless words. He would not speak; he had sacrificed Vivian to his greater mind; he had made a god—a Juggernaut—of his own intellect. If it failed him, what had he to offer in atonement to mankind? He *had* to atone. He was working out his debt to society.

He had had a full day, and was more than usually tired to-night. Perhaps the dramatic contrast of himself as the world saw him,

and himself as he was, had struck him a blow from which he was quivering still. Even Marion had seemed farther removed from him than ever. She was so calm in her silence, her watchfulness. She never alluded to the past; she merely looked at him; but that silent rebuke he dreaded more than words. She was like the discovery which seemed so near and was yet beyond him. He saw her every day, many times in the day; of necessity the usual routine of life left them frequently alone together. But still the power of her will and of his stricken conscience forbade him to lay a finger on her sleeve. If she passed him a cup of tea, and their hands touched by accident, she drew her hand away with quiet eyes, while his flamed with a passionate yearning. If in passing she chanced to touch him, a hock of emotion made his heart beat fast. But he never surprised an expression on her face which gave him hope. He never dared to talk cheerfully of his prospects in her presence, to ask her sympathy in his success. He never dared to tell her: "I am sad and weary, comfort me." His guilt had raised a barrier between them which neither patience nor frenzy could break down. "You gave me up when you sinned," her silence said to him. "When you confess I will come back to you."

But it was the one thing he could not do even for her; it was too late. His pose of St George to humanity could not be relinquished now. He had gone too far, he had risen too high, to waste himself for a sentiment. She was bound to think in a certain way because she was a woman and religious, and all women's ideas of morality are conventional. But his, the masculine mind, was able to take a broader view of things. What he had done since Vivian's sentence was passed, amply justified his own decision. While he had become of more and more value to the community at large, Vivian had shown of what poor stuff he was made by the deterioration a few months of misfortune had wrought in him. The strong man would not have shown such marks of ill usage so soon; the hunted look, the furtiveness, those shaky hands which Marion had pitied, were signs to Garth that the scapegoat had been chosen by a grim economy on the part of Fate. The worthless had been taken and the valuable left! If he could make this discovery he sought,

would he not have earned his right to say: "I have done well"?

It was the ground he went over perpetually in his unconquerable thirst for self-justification, and it always sent him back feverishly to his labours. Never to rest until the end was attained! He was a slave toiling for his freedom—the slave of conscience.

But to-night even the spur of memory, with which he was in the habit of pricking on his flagging energy, could not prevent his eyelids from drooping with the need of sleep. It was torture to keep awake. The clock struck two. He knew by the silence of the house that the last guest had gone, and he longed for bed; but if he slept, how could he work? Time was precious. If he yielded to every lust of the senses, how could he buy his redemption in her eyes and his own? Death might come to-morrow, and if there were a God, it was sure that He did not sleep.

He went to a drawer and fetched a hypodermic syringe. Then he took a couple of tabloids out of a little bottle, dissolved them in water, and partly filled the syringe.

His actions had been rapid so far. At this point, however, he hesitated. A shudder ran through him. He put down the syringe and went back to his work.

For a moment his own emotions had balked fatigue, but it returned. He scarcely knew what he was doing. He was blind, deaf, half asleep as he stood.

Three o'clock was his usual hour for striking work—he rose at eight—and it was useless to give in. He returned to the syringe. It seemed to tempt him. Much as he longed for rest he denied it to himself. Brain must conquer mere flesh and blood, or man was no more than animal. He had set himself a daily meed of toil, and it must be performed.

If he had been watching the action of a friend he would have snatched the syringe away, with strong words on the criminal folly of such a spur. But the idea was in his head that he must work at any cost. She expected it of him he demanded it of himself. He was eating his cake—his freedom and the approbation of the world—and in self-respect must pay for it.

He rolled up the sleeve of his left arm and injected the liquid. It was a reckless thing to do ; no one knew that better than he ; the vice, become a habit, would lead a man to madness. But he did not intend to let it become a habit. He would only make use of it this once.

In a minute the effects of the cocaine began to appear. His weariness passed off, the clouds of sleep cleared from his brain, and again he was broad awake, and eager for the work to which he had been unequal for days. A sense of abnormal bodily and mental power possessed him. He was quite calm ; his mind was clear ; his heart light. He felt isolated from the world, so far from the earth that its troubles vanished with it in the air. The man was happy. He could have laughed aloud from sheer excess of *bien-être*. With renewed vigour he returned to his work-bench. He was no longer daunted by difficulties ; nothing seemed insurmountable. Once more the will-o'-the-wisp he pursued danced radiantly before his eyes—close, closer than ever before.

If only this blissful state could last ! But in half-an-hour the drug began to wear itself out. His brief brilliance passed ; sleep overpowered him once more, and would not be denied. He might as well have yielded to nature in the beginning after all.

Even to mount the stairs seemed too great an effort. He went to the dining-room, threw himself on the couch, and fell into the deep sleep of exhaustion.

CHAPTER XVIII

TREGENNA'S NEWS

It was winter once more in North Cornwall. For several days a heavy mist had hung over hill and dale, but this afternoon the wind had risen and brought rain with it. A downpour, half sleet, greeted Tregenna as he turned his dog-cart out of the yard at the "Talk o' the Vale" and started homeward in the remaining daylight. He was earlier than usual this afternoon. He had been doing a great deal lately, and another man would have felt overdone, but Tregenna had the physical strength of a bull, and never broke down.

He did not seem to take any notice of the weather, which he would have cursed at another time. In a little while the water dripped off his hat on to the seat, and made an island of one of the cushion buttons. Clouds swept low across the bare landscape; the very hedges stood aslant against the wind; a flock of gulls, driven inward by stress of weather, settled on a ploughed field, and sat motionless among the furrows, like Noah's Ark pigeons made of painted wood.

Tregenna was thinking. He allowed the horse—too fat from want of work—to relax his moderate pace and crawl up the least incline. His eyes were blank. It was only when a diverted stream of raindrops trickled from the brim of his hat upon his nose that he shook himself like a great water-dog and flicked his whip at the horse's ears.

Prudence had made up a good fire for him, and was sitting beside it, with a pile of his socks in her lap, when he came in.

She gave him his slippers as usual, and fussed over his damp clothes, which he refused to change.

"You'll catch your death of cold, John," she said lugubriously. "You think because you're strong that nothin' can happen to you, but I've seen men as good as you get something for all that."

"What a Job's comforter you are," he said.

But he was not as cross as he usually was when she worried him, and sank into the arm-chair by the fire with the air of abandoning himself to luxury.

Prudence resumed her darning, and bit off an end of wool. Tregenna had taken some letters out of his pocket, and was reading them in silence, and she glanced at him sometimes. His massive, round head still represented her ideal of masculine beauty, although the word "ideal" was unknown to her vocabulary. John was a "fine figure of a man" in her estimation. She had absorbed from him an unconscious contempt for men who were small or weak or delicate. Tregenna could knock a big fellow down, and had done so before now. Often she remembered how frightened she had been over a drunken miner with a grievance who had come to the house one Saturday to make a row, and how easily John had disposed of him.

She glanced at him again in a gush of tenderness. It was nice to have him sitting there. She would not know what to do without him, especially when he was good-tempered, as he had been of late. It was quite a long time since they had had a word. He had never behaved so well to her since the first year of their marriage. Only the other day he had brought her a new claret jug from Plymouth to replace the one she had broken in the summer. It stood on the sideboard at this moment, gleaming beautifully in the firelight. He was a good husband. She had a heap to be grateful for.

The tears were always near the surface with Prudence, and she blinked away a mist, and considered a triangular hole in a heel with painful seriousness and care. She *would* take everything so seriously. The woman wore herself out over trifles to which another person would not have given a second thought.

Supper was rather a silent meal. There was a nice piece of pork, and greens, with a batter pudding to follow, and Tregenna's absorption did not spoil his appetite. Afterwards they resumed their places by the fire. He smoked, she darned.

By-and-by he broke the silence abruptly.

"I've just finished a good stroke of business which I've been at for months. I'm a rich man; do you know that?"

"I suppose you've been pretty well off for some time, haven't you?" she said in a musing tone.

"But I mean *rich*," he said with emphasis, "*real* rich—what a gentleman calls rich. For the last two or three years my income's been about fifteen hundred a year. Now I'm going to make it ten thousand. I've just clinched the amalgamation of my 'Talk o' the Vale' with six other mines. I always had something like that in my mind's eye."

"Ten thousand! Do you mean ten thousand pounds a year, John?" queried Prudence faintly.

"That's it. What else does 'income' mean?"

The woman's hands sank all trembling into her lap. She looked scared, as though the idea of such vast wealth overpowered her.

"Lord save us," she said, "what's the good of so much? What'll you do with it all? It frightens me!"

He looked at her with a mocking smile, stretched himself, and rose.

"The more the better; I'm not frightened of it," he said. "I'm going to bed. I deserve a rest."

CHAPTER XIX

AN EVENTFUL DAY

"... WHO knoweth any Impediment, or notable Crime, in any of them for which he ought not to be received into this Holy Ministry, let him come forth in the name of God, and show what the Crime or Impediment is."

The voice of the Bishop of Porthminster proceeded solemnly from the Gothic throne, and in the dim light of the coloured cathedral windows Rachel's eyes rested with peculiar emotions on her brother's head.

It was the day of St John's admission to the priesthood, and she and Mamie had come over to Porthminster to witness his ordination with that of two other young deacons. By the kindness and favour of the Bishop his year of probation had been shortened considerably, for St John's was one of those rare and perfect lives in whom it is almost impossible to find a flaw. From their first meeting the Bishop had regarded him with special interest, and Rachel and Mamie were the guests to-day of his wife and daughter, who were also there.

"... Verily, verily I say unto you, he that entereth not by the doors into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a robber."

Rachel's mind floated on a growing tide of emotion. Like many women of highly strung temperament, her religion was largely a matter of the senses. Under the excitement of beautiful scenes or music she could exalt herself to a state of fervid faith impossible without the necessary stimulus.

Thoughts of Stephen's crime, her own dealings with Tregenna, mingled with the dramatic contrast St John presented to her eyes to-day. With him everything was beautiful; to live was

to believe; and to believe was to be safe in God's grace. He had no doubts, nothing on his mind. From her place she could see his pure, clear-cut profile, the rapt expression of beatitude. He was happy; he did not know how closely he was allied to tragedy and guilt.

Her eyes turned to the sculptured reredos, wandered in a forest of delicate tracery, followed the spring of the slender columns to the roof. The ray of sunlight which fell through the painted window quivered with the passing of a cloud and rested on St John's head.

There was a lump in her throat.

"Oh, God, don't let him know," she prayed. "May he never know."

She wanted to cry. Life seemed so simple to him, so complex to her. He was the senior by a year, but she felt ten years older than he. Stephen should have been here. It was true that he had intended to come, but was kept away by the same reason which had taken his mother to London, the state of Marion's health. Anxiety on that account was another factor in Rachel's emotions, but as usual her thoughts reverted to Tregenna and her promise. Instead of dwelling upon it less as time passed she dwelt upon it more. She had never been alone with him since that evening in the Cave, and he never alluded, in their meetings, to her promise. But now and then his eyes spoke to her of what had passed between them, and she caught a look on his face which struck her as a look of gloating and turned her sick with dread. It was only a nightmare, of course; the year would pass eventless and leave her free. She was a fool to think twice of it. But she could not dispel the oppression the mere sound of his name gave her. And sometimes in the night when the wind was high, and she lay listening to its moaning about the lonely house, it sounded to her like the footsteps of Fate, hurrying, hurrying, hunting her down—the Fate which whispered breathlessly in her ear at dusk, which lurked in every shadowy corner, and laid an icy hand upon her heart.

It was almost a relief when the ceremony was over, and movement brought a welcome change of thought.

She put her arms round St John's neck and kissed him with a sort of wistfulness. Somehow he seemed farther away from her now than yesterday. Mamie, who did not know the meaning of nerves, and had no secret weighing on her breast, did not appear to feel it. She even chaffed the young priest a little, as they all accompanied the Bishop and his wife and daughter back to the Palace to tea. They walked in pairs: St John with the Bishop, Mamie with Mrs Fairfax, Rachel with Constance Fairfax. Constance was about the same age as Rachel. She was not strictly good-looking, but she had her points: the perfect complexion which sometimes accompanies red hair, a quantity of the red hair itself, very fine shoulders, and beautiful hands. She lacked Rachel's indefinable style, and although her clothes were always made of good material, and well-fitting, she was inclined to dress herself with the tailor-made stiffness and lack of grace with brands the average English-woman in a cosmopolitan crowd. Some of this want of suppleness and adaptability characterised her manner as well—and it was not all unconscious. Without being vain, she took her stand on the vantage ground of a woman bred in the atmosphere which suits her best, and serene in the self-satisfaction of suitable moral, material, and social environment, and settled conventional ideas. As much as it was possible for her to unbend she unbent to Rachel, but Rachel always felt they could never be really intimate with each other.

This afternoon, naturally, they talked of St John, and the subject, of such interest to Rachel, drew her into closer sympathy than usual with Constance Fairfax.

Constance approved of St John, who possessed the hall mark of her father's esteem. "My father, the Bishop of Porthminster" was an even greater personage in the eyes of his daughter than of the rest of the world. She was a model of filial devotion, but it was just possible she would not have thought quite as much of him if he had remained the vicar of an obscure country parish.

"Yes," she said in her complacent way, "I hope we shall see a great deal of your brother, and that the Church has won in him as valuable a doctor of souls as Dr Garth is a doctor of

bodies! The Bishop," she added, "has the highest opinion of him."

"I am very glad," said Rachel, her eyes soft and her voice tremulous with pleasure.

"He was saying only yesterday," added Constance, "how fortunate your mother was in both her sons: that the elder had already done so much, that the younger promised so well. Of course, it must have been a great advantage to your brother St John to grow up with Dr Garth's example before him, and to have the guidance of a brother several years older than himself to replace that of a father."

"Certainly Stephen has been a good brother," said Rachel.

"I can imagine nothing more dreadful," continued Miss Fairfax, "than a home cursed by a bad father or a bad son. To have one's happiness ruined, one's name dishonoured, by near connection with a spendthrift, a gambler, a drunkard! To be forced to rely upon a man who is unreliable! To live in constant fear of some scandal which would close the doors of decent society in one's face! What could be worse? One cannot be too thankful, Rachel, that such shadows do not darken our lives."

Rachel's eyes were fixed upon the hard country road; she felt as though weight tied to her lids to keep them down, as though a weight weighed to her heart to keep that down too.

"I have no fear for St John," she said in a low tone. "I suppose I regard him with a sister's love, but I am sure—I am sure that nothing will lead a nature like his astray. Even as a child he was almost faultless—while Mamie and I were perfect little demons," she added, with a gleam of fun—a sunbeam piercing a storm-cloud flitting across her downcast face. "We shall miss him deeply when he leaves home. It will be a great sorrow for us if his first curacy is far away."

Constance Fairfax smiled.

"One can imagine you would like to keep him near you. Perhaps you will have your wish fulfilled."

"Of course," said Rachel, "he will have to take what he can get. Fortunately, Stephen's success and goodness to us leaves St John quite free. He has only himself to think about."

"I am sure he will get on," said Constance. "You need have no anxiety on his account."

They reached the Palace in the wake of Mrs Fairfax and Mamie. The Bishop and St John were following them slowly far behind.

Constance drew off her gloves and warmed her hands at the fire.

"Draw your chair closer, Rachel," she said. "Have you rung for tea, mother?"

It came as she spoke, and the daughter of the house took her usual place at the table. Constance liked pouring out tea. It showed off her hands, and the air of hostess suited her style. She was a woman who never grew uncomfortably hot or flushed with nervousness when she had to refill the cups of two people—of whom one took sugar and the other did not—and keep the ball of conversation rolling at the same time.

Rachel held her cup with a sensation of unreality. She could not feel at home here to-day. If these people knew what Stephen had done—Stephen whom they admired so much—what would they say? It seemed to her that the secret made her a hypocrite, especially after what Constance had said. There were no skeletons in the cupboard here. Everything was orderly, above criticism, open to the light of day, and she actually belonged to one of those unhappy families of whom Constance had spoken with mingled horror and contempt! Creature of imagination as she was, sensitive, nervous, emotional, she crouched suffocating under the mantle of Stephen's secret sin. The very room oppressed her; its stately proportions, the refined harmony of upholstery and walls, the cabinets of valuable old china, the gleam of marble, the warmer light of Corinthian bronze. There was no note of discord except herself.

She was afraid, miserably, irrationally afraid. If they should find out the truth! She pictured herself in all sorts of horrible positions which could never occur. She fancied the Bishop turning upon her, and asking her severely if she thought herself, Stephen Garth's sister, a fit person to be entertained under his roof. She could see Constance's look of half pity, half scorn, and the pain on the gentle face of Mrs Fairfax.

Her mouth was dry and her tongue clung to the roof of it. She prayed to escape, to be at home, where there was no one who could fling a stone at him or her, and those who did not choose to associate with them could stay away.

The cup was trembling in her hand when Dr Fairfax came in, followed by St John. The Bishop's pleasant face wore a cheery smile of satisfaction, and the young priest was boyishly radiant and flushed. He went to Rachel.

"What do you think, Rachel? The Bishop has offered me his chaplaincy!"

"Oh, St John! Do you hear, Mamie? How kind of him! How delightful for you! I am so glad, dear boy. Now everything is indeed well with you!"

"I owe it all to being Stephen's brother, I am sure," he said humbly. "The Bishop thinks so much of him that a corner of his mantle of righteousness has fallen over me! Good old Stephen!"

Rachel froze. If she ventured impulsively to raise her head but for an instant, it was struck down again. Stephen—Stephen, always Stephen! Had they no souls of their own?

"I hope the Bishop only says that in order to prevent you becoming vain," she said, with a half-smiling glance at the Bishop, "and that he thinks fairly well of you on your own account."

It was evident the subject had already been discussed in the Bishop's family circle, and that Constance had known what was in the wind, although she had not felt at liberty to forestall her father by informing Rachel on the way home.

They were talking animatedly when a servant appeared with a telegram for Rachel.

There was a tense silence at once. The Bishop voiced the general feeling as Rachel opened the envelope with nervous hands.

"Of course, it is from Dr Garth. I hope—I sincerely hope—that all is as we wish?"

Rachel's expression relaxed.

"‘A son has been born to us,’" she read aloud. "‘Mother and child both doing well.—STEPHEN.’"

CHAPTER XX

MAMIE DELIVERS A LECTURE

MR ADOLPHUS WETHERBY was sick of the world, especially of that little corner of it called Carnruan. He banged the school-room door like the cross boy he was, rammed his straw hat fiercely on his head, and strode out of the gate with the gloominess of a Stafford going to execution.

Outside he hesitated which way to turn. On the left the road wound over the hill and bent inland to St Ruth, on the left it led to the village. He gazed in that direction, frowned and stared, and frowned again.

"I've been there four times a day for a week," he muttered. "She'll laugh it me."

There was a pebble in the road; he kicked at it restively. An irresistible attraction drew his eyes to the roof of a house visible on the rising ground between him and the village. He took a reluctant step or two towards it, as though despite himself, and a few more. The struggle terminated as usual, and Mr Adolphus Wetherby, who would be stoically firm and indifferent, but was only a very young man tormented by a mischievous girl and the pangs of love, set off at a good pace for the village.

The roof on which his eyes had been fixed grew nearer; presently a garden wall hove in sight, a casement quaintly set in a wing faced with slate, a tangle of ivy, and, on the other side of the house, a bow window with wooden framework and cross-bars painted white. This window was open, despite the frostiness of the day, and at it stood Mamie giving crumbs to a robin which perched impudently on the sill.

The girl, the bird, the weather-beaten old house and the sunshine—what a picture for the gods! Wetherby turned as pink as yesterday's sunset, and his hand flew to his hat.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Mamie."

"Oh, bother! You've frightened Robin away," she said.

"Never mind, as you are here you can tell me the right time."

There seems to be something funny the matter with our clocks. Perhaps I forgot to wind them up this morning."

"It is a quarter to three," said Wetherby, lingering luxuriously over this choice morsel of conversation. "I trust that your mother and sister are well?"

"I believe so," said Mamie, "unless they have been taken ill on the way to Craddoc. They went in by the wagonette this morning to do some shopping and wait for the London train. Marion is coming down with the baby."

"Indeed! Of course, the baby will be a great excitement."

"Yes; an unpleasant one. I hate babies," said the girl with flippant disdain, regarding Wetherby out of the corners of her bright eyes as the robin had regarded her.

"But I thought all girls liked babies?" he asked.

"Oh, they pretend to, because it's the proper thing to say," replied Mamie, with an air of imparting useful information. "Girls are awful humbugs, you know; they are always showing off."

"Not *all* girls — not *nice* girls?" asked the young man wistfully.

"Yes; they are! Who could gush sincerely over a horrid little toad of a pink baby, so soft that one's afraid of touching it?"

"I supposed it was only men who thought like that," mused Wetherby.

He became so lost in dejected meditation that he seemed to forget he was staring at Mamie.

"What is the matter?" she asked pertly. "Aren't you well?"

"I am very well, thank you, Miss Mamie—at least," he added, coming down from his stilts, "as well as I can expect to be here."

"Why here?" she asked. "Doesn't Carnruan agree with you?"

"No," said Wetherby with sudden passion; "it doesn't! Who would care to spend his life in a village teaching boys Latin verbs?"

"Nobody would—who was even half a man," replied the girl promptly. "So it has actually occurred to you at last!"

"I—— Yes." Her vehemence appeared to puzzle him.

"Then why on earth don't you go away?"

"How can I?" he hesitated. "There's the school, you see."

"Sell it," replied Mamie promptly. "One would think you were a potato and could not uproot yourself from your native soil!"

"I've been thinking about it lately."

"Thinking's no good! One must do something in this world."

"But what am I fit for? Where should I go?"

"Oh, go to London and enlist! Go to the Colonies and grow sheep or canned fruit or whatever they grow there."

"Anywhere, in fact, away from Carnruan and the few friends I possess," he said bitterly, "and take my chance with five hundred pounds. Of course, you don't care what becomes of me. Who does?"

"Yes," she said; "anywhere to escape from your rut, and show the stuff you're made of. You're too good to waste your life here—though sometimes I begin to despair of you!"

"Too good!" he repeated, with a quick breath of surprise. "Too good!" He had been standing at the gate all the while. He wished now that he were nearer the window. "Do you mean that?"

"Well, you needn't be anything very talented or heroic to be too good for the sort of thing you're doing now," replied Mamie impatiently. "Here am I talking when I ought to be on my way to Craddoc!"

"You are going to Craddoc?"

"Yes—to meet Marion, of course."

"You are going to walk all the way alone?"

The girl nodded.

"I should be so glad if—if," stammered Wetherby, "you would allow me to accompany you? I want to get something at the bookstall."

"Wait," said Mamie, "while I get on my things."

He swung the gate while he waited. It was a jolly gate with a strong hinge and a good wide sweep. His countenance was no longer gloomy. The horizon had widened suddenly. He had been lazy and a coward, sticking like a limpet to his native rock because it was the easiest thing to do. But if she would think more of him for going away. . . . He knew as well

what had aroused his drowsing energy of late and made him wholesomely dissatisfied with his easy, unambitious life, as he knew why he still lingered on at Carnruan.

He was suddenly fired with a desire to go at once. How was it possible he had had the patience to remain at home so long? A schoolmaster—a schoolmaster in a village! Why, the world was waiting for men like him—men of muscle, men of education; steady fellows without vice who weren't afraid of work. He must have been asleep to be content with his paltry income when there were fortunes to be made, honours to be gained, women to be won!

The gate swung faster and faster under the impetus of his eager feet. Fired by new ambition he was already banking fortunes and building castles in the air.

"You'll certainly fall off that gate," said Mamie, coming out of the house, "break it down."

He awoke and descended to earth.

"We shall have to look sharp to be in time for the 4.5," he said prosaically.

Mamie agreed, and stepped out with the ease of a girl whose life is spent out of doors. She was as hardy as a boy, and the picture of health. The bloom on her cheeks scarcely deepened with the exercise. She squared her shoulders and breathed naturally, and could talk all the while. They were out of the village in no time.

"I've decided to go," he said jerkily.

"Oh, you have made up your mind!"

"I shall go as soon as I can get rid of the school. I've an uncle in Australia. He's got a sheep run, I believe. I'll write and ask him if there's an opening there."

"A very good idea," she said.

"If I go, will you write to me, Mamie?"

Mamie became aggravatingly interested in a blackbird on a bush.

"Oh, I hate writing letters," she said. "What's the good?"

"I'd like to know how you—you were all getting on," he said a little huskily, "and as I've nobody belonging to me, it's nobody's business to send me a line—if nobody cares."

"I may write now and then," said Mamie nonchalantly, "when there's something to say. Nothing happens here. You know that as well as I do."

"You're awfully good," he murmured, breathing hard. "I'll treasure every line, and—and——"

"Look at that hedge," said Mamie. "I believe it's budding already. We shall have an early spring."

The stricken Mr Wetherby was incapable of response. If he spoke sentimentally she snubbed him; if he looked at her admiringly she snubbed him. Nevertheless, she cared what became of him, it seemed, and she was going to write—now and then, when there was something to say. At last he had begun to suspect, with delicious thrills traversing his spine, that she was not really quite as indifferent as she chose to pretend. If he could go away with that hope—the hope of winning this lovely bud of womanhood some day—he felt there was no summit of earthly success to which he might not attain. He ventured to ask her advice presently, on some matter connected with his proposed departure, and Mamie gave it with her usual decision. She was at the age when one has quite made up one's mind about everything in the world, and held in profound contempt all who disagreed with her.

It was a delightful walk for Wetherby at least, and they reached Craddoc Station just in time to speak to Mrs Garth and Rachel before the train arrived.

Colonel Carew had also driven over to meet his niece and her child, and was waiting with Rachel and Mrs Garth on the platform, and it was to him, her own blood, that Marion turned first when she descended, followed by the nurse with the baby.

She looked more beautiful than ever in the first flush of young motherhood. There was a new look in her eyes, an additional tenderness in her greeting of the old man who had been as a father to her. His grey hairs had become inexpressibly pathetic to her since remorse for her share in his broken life had been added to her pity for him and Vivian.

Of course, the baby came in for a large share of attention, from the women in particular. Colonel Carew seemed to shrink from

the little bundle of quilted silk. Perhaps it reminded him too painfully of Vivian's infancy.

"I am sure he is a lovely child, or he would not be yours, Marion," he said, with his old-fashioned courtesy; "but you shall show him to me when we reach home. This draughty platform cannot be good for him or any of us. Mrs Garth, you will come with us, of course? I am sorry I cannot offer you girls a lift too. Wetherby will see you home, no doubt, in a fly."

Wetherby, however, was oblivious for the moment to masculine voices. He was watching a wonderful sight: Mamie, the flippant, the hard-hearted, cooing like an angelic dove to the "horrid little toad" of a baby.

Of course, he stared so long and so hard that she looked up and caught him at it, and froze him with a defiant glare.

Adolphus stammered, grown idiotic.

"I—I suppose it can talk by now?"

"How can you be so ridiculous!" she snapped. "The child is only six weeks old."

"Yes, of course," he said, with a feeble giggle. "They don't begin as young as that, do they? Not for three—er—or four months?"

"Rachel," said Mamie, turning impatiently to her sister, "shall we go back in Nick's wagonette? I don't see the good of wasting six shillings on a fly."

Rachel agreed, and Wetherby accompanied them. Was that why Mamie had proposed the amendment—to save his pride and his purse?

It gave Rachel curious emotions to see Marion with Stephen's child, knowing what a division separated husband and wife now. She wondered how Marion felt towards him, if this living link softened her regard for the man who had been her hero once, or if she only pitied the child for being the offspring of such a father. It was more than she could do, more than one better versed in the world of men and women than she could have done, to penetrate the mask of Marion Garth's studied quiet, and read the secrets of her soul.

Mamie and Wetherby quarrelled in an undertone during the drive, and left Rachel to her own meditations. The elder sister

did not notice how Mamie had begun to trample upon Adolphus Wetherby, and how he allowed himself to be trampled upon. Poor thing, she had forgotten there were such things as lovers in the world. There were men like Tregenna, but he was not a real lover. Love makes sacrifice of itself; he only wished to sacrifice her.

She could never pass the slate quarry without thinking of him. Once more her fingers tingled at the memory of their contact with his cheek. She had been daring then; she was a coward to-day. To rise to the crisis of a moment was different from living through eight months such as this.

If the man had been a Machiavelli, seeking revenge for that blow, he could not have contrived surer means of tormenting a girl of her temperament. Her own imagination was the rack on which she writhed week in, week out, with ever-increasing anguish. If she did not see him for a few days she dreaded that something was the matter which meant mischief to Prudence and to her; if he called twice a week, she imagined he came to inspect his property and regard her with a prospective owner's eyes. She hated and feared him so much that she began to know his habits, his mannerisms, his likes and dislikes, as one only observes what one hates and loves. She noticed he had cut himself while shaving just in the cleft of his massive chin; she noticed the colour of his tie, and the way he put it on; the way he looked up when he was thinking, not down as women do. She had loved Vivian, but she had never watched him so closely, because she had always been in pleasant confusion when he was near.

With every day that passed, bringing the end of the year nearer, the tension grew till it drew a tight band across her forehead to think at all. It was in vain that she called herself to account for her folly in making so much out of a whim of this man. It was in vain she tried to believe that this time next year would find Prudence Tregenna alive and well, and her contract ended. She recalled his eagerness to extract the promise from her in the Cave that day; she shivered once more at the recollection of the smile, so oddly triumphant, with which he watched her ascend the cliff. No woman had ever wished time away so passionately as Rachel wished away the next few months.

Marion was to stay with her uncle as usual, but whenever she was at Poldinnick the girls were constantly with her or she was with them.

This time the child would often draw Mrs Garth up the hill, no doubt, and although she rarely went out at nights, she had consented to dine at Poldinnick this evening in order to gloat in grandmotherly pride and joy over the first-born of her best-loved son.

The girls were invited also, but went home first to change their walking dresses. Wetherby, who had not been asked, was obliged to take leave of them disconsolately at The Haven gate. But after all he had much to be grateful for, and when Mamie lingered a moment behind Rachel to say good-bye to him again, he could have fallen on his knees and kissed her dear little muddy shoes.

CHAPTER XXI

A MESSAGE FROM PRUDENCE

As Rachel entered the house, the servant met her.

"The coachman has just come over from St Ruth's to say that Mrs Tregenna is unwell, miss, and would be grateful if you'd step round and see her. She's sent the dog-cart for you."

Rachel stared stupidly.

"Mrs Tregenna unwell! Are you *sure* that was the message?"

"Quite sure, miss. But the coachman is in the kitchen. Perhaps you'd like to see him. He came at five o'clock."

Rachel went into the kitchen. She was so horrified by the news that she was trying not to believe it.

Tregenna's man sat by the fire comfortably, drinking a cup of tea and eating buttered toast. He rose, looking shy, as Rachel entered.

"Is Mrs Tregenna very ill?" asked Rachel.

"She looks mortal bad, miss, though she's been up and about as usual till to-day."

"What does the doctor say?"

"She hasn't had no doctor."

"No doctor!" repeated Rachel. "Why not?"

"She don't believe in 'em, miss. She took a dose o' physic last night."

"What are her symptoms?"

"Oh, she feels badly, miss," said the man vaguely. "I don't know whether there's anything partic'lar."

"I'll go over at once," said Rachel.

She was not surprised that Prudence should send for her. The woman seemed to have taken a fancy to her, especially of late—a fancy which gave her almost a morbid interest in Rachel's appearance, her clothes, her well-kept hair and hands, and any little trinket she might be wearing.

The dog-cart was at the side door, and, after a word with her mother, Rachel got in and drove away.

It was to her as though she had dreamed something like this—not once, but many times; that nightmare which had been haunting her for months was realised this afternoon. Whenever she was thinking about her promise to Tregenna, the possibility of her being called upon to fulfil it sent a hot thrill through the girl's frame. She had felt that thrill so often that the news she dreaded most to hear found her almost numbed.

The road was dark and lonely, and the coachman, a taciturn Cornishman, sat silent as the grave. A tree would suddenly shoot a gaunt arm across the road above her head; a cow startled her by rising behind the hedge; the lights of a cottage were like the eyes of a friend.

Rachel drew the rug round her and shivered. At moments she could not realise where she was going and why; at others she could scarcely contain her impatience to be at her journey's end.

When at last the straggling village of St Ruth hove in sight and they branched up the lane which led to Tregenna's spick-and-span new house, she ached with suspense, and scarcely waited for the dog-cart to stop before springing out.

"How is Mrs Tregenna?" were her first words to the servant who opened the door.

"About the same, miss. She 'opes you'll go into the dining-room, and take a glass of wine after your cold drive."

"I don't care for any, thank you. Is Mr Tregenna at home?"

"Yes, miss. He's with missus. I'll go up and tell her you've arrived."

She showed Rachel into the dining-room, where a bright fire was burning, and a decanter of sherry and a decanter of port and a biscuit box stood on a salver in readiness for her. It was so like Prudence to think it necessary to offer refreshments at once! She would have grizzled for a week if by any mischance she had allowed a caller to depart without partaking of her hospitality.

Rachel went to the fire. The room with the crimson flock wall-paper, the oleographs in their bright gilt frames, and the "Marly Horses" on the mantelshelf, used to give her a carefully suppressed desire to laugh once upon a time, but now she regarded it all without a smile. Everything appertaining to Tregenna possessed the elements of a tragedy. He was not to be laughed at. The man, as crude as his ideas of decoration, was a force in her life which had to be considered with the utmost seriousness. He had the power and brutality, the dogged persistence, which often accompanies the primitive passions of the soil. The man or woman who sneered at John Tregenna would be a fool.

There were various signs of his domestic habits about the room: a pipe and tobacco-jar on a little table in the alcove by the fire; a "Tantalus" spirit frame on the sideboard; a mining journal on a chair. The journal was open on its face, just as he had laid it down, and she could fancy him smoking in the easy-chair, with his big hands resting on the arms, as Prudence must have seen him so many times.

Her eyes lighted suddenly upon a packet which was lying on the table. It was a neat little white packet, such as a chemist might send out, and there was a large red poison label pasted across it. By straining her eyes she could just see, from her station by the hearth, the other inscription which it bore:

"Arsenic. Sample from 'Talk o' the Vale' Mine."

She caught at her breath as though she had had a shock. Arsenic! Stephen Garth's sister knew enough about poisons to be aware that there was sufficient in that packet to kill the population of a village. It seemed dangerous to leave such a thing

about, with servants in the house. One could never be sure, too, who might not come in, and mistakes are made by ignorant people. Tregenna was probably so accustomed to handling the stuff that it did not occur to him to lock it up. She wondered that he should bring it home with him at all. All his business was transacted at the office of the mine. He could have no use for the poison in his own house.

Her gaze still rested upon it. No object in the room was as conspicuous as that little white packet with the red label. It possessed a sort of sinister fascination for her. Why was it lying there? Why had he brought it home? A man ought not to have such a dangerous weapon so ready to his hand. It might be a temptation to someone who had an enemy. It might even tempt him——

The girl put her hand to her forehead. What frightful ideas were running through her mind! She was overwrought; at another time, surely, she would not have given so much thought to the packet of poison! It seemed to menace her, to threaten the sick woman upstairs. She was afraid of it. She felt as though she dared not go away and leave it lying there.

She went over to it, and picked it up gingerly. At the same moment she heard someone coming downstairs. If Tregenna should enter and find her tampering with his property, what would he say?

She hesitated, the steps drew nearer. Summoning all her courage she flung the packet of poison into the fire, and rammed it down among the coals.

The poker was still in her hand, and her cheeks were very red when Tregenna entered.

"So Prudence has been sending for you," he said. "I've just been telling her what I think of bringing you out on such a night."

"There is nothing the matter with the night, and I didn't mind coming."

"There's an east wind like a knife," he grumbled, coming nearer, and regarding her with that half sullen, half hungry look of his. "I shouldn't be surprised if you'd taken cold. Have a drop of brandy?"

"No, thank you," said the girl.

He stood quite close to her on the hearthrug, and she still bent towards the flame, one hand upon the mantelshelf, in an attitude of unconscious beauty. The firelight cast a glow upon her cheeks, and played at hide-and-seek among the blue-black shadows of her hair, and she gazed back at him with eyes mutinous, resentful, half veiled by their full, white lids.

"She's a crazy fool!" he burst out with a sudden hoarse passion, which seemed inspired more by the defiant manner of the girl before him than the meek invalid upstairs. "There's nothing the matter with her. Whenever she gets a cold in her head she thinks she's going to die."

"Does she think she's going to die this time?"

"I don't know," he said sulkily; "she's fussing and fussing and dosing herself up there."

Rachel straightened her flat young back, and stood before the man a sick-set figure as erect as a sapling shoot.

"Why don't you send for the doctor?" she asked.

"How do you know she hasn't had a doctor?"

"I inquired of Jones."

"Oh, you did! It's none o' my business," he said, resenting her insinuation in a sort of fury. "She isn't a child. She can have a dozen doctors if she likes. I'm out all day, and she's got enough women to look after her. What the devil she wanted to drag you out for to-night. . . . As you are here, you'll stop and have a bit of supper with me, Rachel?"

"No, thank you. They are expecting me at Poldinnick. I must get back as soon as I have seen Prudence."

She moved towards the door.

"Wait a bit," he said. "There's no hurry."

"I've got to get back," repeated Rachel, "and I've come to see *her*."

"I know you'd rather sup with the devil than with me," he muttered.

He turned his back on her with the sulkiness of a spoilt child, but after she had gone he ground his teeth and clenched his hands. He always meant to keep quiet, but the mere sight of her made a fool of him. He could scarcely contain himself when she was in the room. She always left him in mingled misery and

rage. Nevertheless, he took the trouble after a moment to open the door in order that he might see her again as she left the house. Rachel went upstairs to Mrs Tregenna's room and knocked.

"Come in, my dear," said Prudence.

She was sitting up in bed, with her face puckered pathetically, and her hands folded on the outside of the sheet. Her plain white nightgown, which buttoned at the throat without even a frill of lace, bore a curious contrast to the room, which was furnished in the expensive tasteless style of the rest of the house. Every piece of furniture which could contain a sheet of bevelled looking-glass contained one; the wardrobe would have held all Prudence's clothes half-a-dozen times over; the curtains and the carpet clashed with a ferocity which set one's teeth on edge. There was everything for comfort—an arm-chair, a couch, plenty of space; but the room looked no more comfortable, nevertheless, than the drawing-room, which was the pride of her heart.

Rachel took the hand which had done so much honest hard work in its time.

"So you are not feeling well," she said gently. "I am so sorry. What is the matter?"

"It was good of you to come, my dear," said Prudence. "You may think it strange of me to want you and nobody else. You are always so kind and sympathetic. I don't know what is the matter, but I'm feeling real poorly. I've been suffering from a bad cold lately and maybe it's pulled me down a bit, and now I seem to have got a touch of indigestion on top of it. It's nothing much, I'm sure, but I've got the blues lying here by myself with Tregenna away all day. Gals are no good; they think of nothin' but havin' their meals reg'lar, and taking their night out if the heavens was to fall."

"Do you mind if I bring the lamp nearer?" said Rachel. "I can't see you very well."

"As you like, my dear. Put it on this little table. I had it left over there because the light hurts my eyes, and they're that inflamed I don't even care about looking at the newspaper, which would help to pass the time. I'm sure they feel as if there was sand in 'em."

Rachel, who had fetched the lamp, examined Prudence in the

brighter light, which made her flinch. The woman really looked ill. Her eyes were bloodshot, the lower lids puffy, her face even paler than usual. She coughed and groaned.

"Does it hurt you to cough?" asked Rachel.

"I'm sore and uncomfortable," whimpered Prudence. "It must be indigestion, or perhaps the coughing. I'm sure I haven't been eating anything—unless it was that welsh rabbit going to bed the other night. It's very trying," she added. "But I shall get up to-morrow. Goodness knows what's going on in the house. Most likely the table-napkins are being used for tea-cloths, and the drippin's being wasted right and left."

"I think you ought to see the doctor, Mrs Tregenna," said Rachel. "What a pity you didn't send for him to-day, then you might have been up and well to-morrow."

"Oh, I don't believe in sending for doctors and messing with physic for every little ache and pain—excuse me saying so, my dear, with your brother a doctor," said Prudence. "There'd be no end to the expense, and what's the use of wasting money?"

"I am sure Mr Tregenna can afford the expense, and would not mind it," said Rachel.

"Maybe I'll 'ave him to-morrow," said Prudence wearily, "unless I'm better. I've only had soup to-day—beef tea and bread and milk—thinking it best to give one's stomach a rest. It's mortal trying." She groaned again. "It's drawing-room day to-morrow, and I daren't let them gals touch the silk screen and the mantel border and the chiny ornaments."

"Do you know what I believe would do you more good than anything, Mrs Tregenna?" said Rachel. "A thorough rest and change. I am sure you do too much. Whenever I come you seem busy. I scarcely ever see you sit down quietly for half-an-hour. With four servants you ought to have a very easy life. I think you take things too seriously, and work much harder than there is the least occasion for. Why don't you go up to London for a fortnight, and see the sights and look at the shops?"

"Me—go up to London alone!" exclaimed Prudence, as much aghast as if it had been suggested that she should go to China.

"Or even to Plymouth," said Rachel. "I know you have friends there."

"And how would John get on without me? There'd be nobody to see after his comforts." Prudence shook her head. "No; I couldn't go away from 'ome, my dear. I shouldn't enjoy anything without John. He's been that kind and nice to me lately that I couldn't bear to leave him. I should only be worrying all the time to get back, and that wouldn't do me any good."

"You are certainly a very obstinate woman," said Rachel, with a smile which was checked by a sigh. "What is the use of calling me in if you refuse to follow my prescription? I wish my brother Stephen were here; he would manage you!"

"It isn't that I'm ungrateful, my dear," murmured Prudence apologetically, "but I really can't leave John. I'd rather—I'd rather send for the doctor."

"What a concession! Shall I tell him on my way home?"

"Oh, no," said Prudence in haste, "because I might be better in the morning, and it would be such a waste! Did you see if they'd laid the table for John's supper?"

"It wasn't laid when I was downstairs."

"Lord," sighed Prudence, "it's quite enough that I'm up here for them to be late with it. I hope you'll stop and have a bit with him?"

Rachel refused the wife's invitation more gently than she had refused the husband's, and promised to call again in the morning. Prudence thanked her tearfully for the visit, which had been such a comfort. She was anxious that Rachel should have another rug in the dog-cart, which would take her home, of course.

Rachel descended the stairs thoughtfully. It was a relief to hear Prudence speak so feelingly of her husband. The wild suspicions which had distracted her at sight of the packet of arsenic seemed absurd in the light of this kind behaviour towards his wife. Prudence was easily satisfied, no doubt, but he could not be quite heartless if he took even a little trouble to make her happy.

Rachel intended to steal out of the house without seeing Tregenna again, but he frustrated her design by coming to the dining-room door.

"Well, how do you find her?"

"I think she is worse than she will own. You ought to send for the doctor."

"All right. I'll send for him."

He was considerate and reasonable, and she was mollified.

"She does too much, you know," said the girl abruptly.

"It isn't my fault. I don't want her to do anything. What do I keep servants for?"

"That's what I told her," said Rachel, "but she won't heed. She'll never rest, I am sure, while she remains at home. I've advised her to go away for a week or two."

Tregenna did not answer for a moment. His eyes were fixed, as usual, upon the girl's sensitive, expressive face.

"By all means let her go," he said harshly at last. "I've no objection!"

"She won't leave you," said Rachel, turning to the door. "It's awfully foolish."

"She's satisfied, you see," he said with a sort of gloomy triumph, "and she ought to know!"

The hall was only half lighted—one of Prudence's economies—and Rachel fumbled at the door handle.

"Let me open it for you," he said softly. "May I drive you home?"

"I couldn't think of troubling you. Your supper is ready."

"I'd rather go without supper, and drive you home."

"Thank you; I won't demand such a sacrifice of you," she said drily. "Good-night."

"You are as hard as nails, as hard as nails," he said, his voice thick with passion. "My God, sometimes I hate you as much as I love you!"

"I wish you hated me more," she replied. "It would be better for both of us."

He insisted upon helping her into the dog-cart, and covering her warmly with the rug.

"Mind you drive carefully," he said to the man. "There's a pile of stones at the cross-roads; look out for it. Are your lamps all right?"

Rachel looked up at Mrs Tregenna's window as she drove away, not at him. The lighted blind recalled the tasteless, ex-

pensive room to her mind's eyes, and Prudence, pale-faced, weak-eyed, and pathetic, sitting up in her plain nightgown in the great brass bed.

Next day when Rachel called the invalid was better. She was up, busily superintending the eternal process of "turning out" as usual, and seemed rather ashamed of her nervousness of the day before.

"I'm sure I don't know what you must have thought of me, my dear," she said. "How foolish it would have been if I'd sent for the doctor!"

"It is always better to be over-cautious than neglectful when illness is concerned," replied Rachel, with the wisdom of sixty.

Prudence still looked far from well, but the next time Rachel came to see her—it was about a week later—Mrs Tregenna had improved wonderfully. There was even a rosy colour in her cheeks, and she had put on flesh, and seemed in unusually good spirits.

"The day in bed must have done me good," she said. "Perhaps I *did* want a rest. I 'aven't had such an appetite for years."

CHAPTER XXII

A SUCCESSFUL MAN

A SMART brougham drove up to Waterloo Station, and the footman sprang down and opened the door.

Garth descended leisurely, and the footman—six feet of magnificence—took the dressing-case, and delegated the portmanteau to a porter.

Garth entered the station, took a ticket for Porthminster, and bought half-a-dozen papers at the book-stall. He wore a fur-lined travelling-coat, and that air of distinction which a successful physician frequently acquires had come to him early in his career. At a glance the man was "somebod." He took no notice of the people who glanced at him; he went about his business with the lack of self-consciousness which is a proof of absolute assurance rather than the humility it is supposed to indicate. It is the vain man who is indifferent to observation

and criticism, and the modest man who glances furtively at every face to detect the smile of ridicule.

Garth was not vain, but he knew his own worth. He had a standing in the world. If he were not already in receipt of the fabulous income of romance, he was doing very well indeed. Money came in fast. He had no need to deny himself anything in reason, and was equally independent of his "backer," whose assistance had not been required after all, and of his wife. In his most sanguine expectations before marriage he had never expected the first year in Harley Street to be so successful—still less had he expected to be so miserable over the success when it came.

There were black days, indeed, and this was one of them, when it seemed to him that the game was not worth the candle. The outward luxury of his life, the fine house, the horses, the broadcloth and fine linen, were but the veulings of an anchorite's hair shirt, which rasped his skin, and forbade him rest. What was the use of possessing so much when he was paying such a price for it? He would have been happier in a cottage on bread and cheese, with a clear conscience, and a wife who loved him—if such an existence were compatible with a successful career. His intellect he could not forego, even for the sake of that doubtful possession—his soul; he would not sink into the dull obscurity of the average country practitioner.

But the hair shirt became more and more unbearable as the possession of all the worldly success he had desired made him less tolerant of self-denial, opposition, restraint. If he had worn it of his own accord—the willing martyr of an ascetic faith—he would have had self-approval to console him; but he was a man who hardened under the suppression of his natural feelings, who grew embittered by the success which was failure in one woman's eyes. She never forgot, she never forgave. That one locked door, when the doors of the rich and great stood open to him, was typical of his life.

She seemed scarcely to like him to touch his own child! As he walked up the platform and took his seat he was recalling how she had almost snatched the boy from him one morning, as though his touch were poisonous; how coldly she had turned

away her head when the nurse had called her attention to the fact that the infant had his father's eyes. Her child and his! And he had to glance at her with apology for kissing this offspring of his own flesh and blood, to feel ashamed of a natural pride, to conceal the emotions which reminded her that she was his wife!

Yes, it was intolerable. If he had known what was before him, would he have acted as he had done? Perhaps not. But it was weak and useless to look back; he could only make the best of things as they were.

The footman put his dressing-bag on the rack, and Garth said he would telegraph when he wished the carriage to be at the station to meet him. He was going down to Cornwall for the week-end to stay with the Bishop of Porthminster. Marion and the child were still at Carnruan—he meant to run over one afternoon—and he had not seen St John since he had become a priest. It was difficult to get away even for a couple of days, but his promise to pay a visit to Porthminster was an old one, the fulfilment of which he could no longer postpone.

Perhaps he found it restful to escape from London in spite of the long railway journey before him. Even that may have been a rest in a way. It enforced physical idleness at anyrate, demanded no mental concentration, permitted his thoughts to wander as they chose. The wilderness of mean streets which flashed by diverted the humanitarian from the contemplation of his own woes by reminding him of the monotony and misery of numberless obscure lives. The opaqueness of the atmosphere made him long for a breath of fresh air. A dim disc in a sky of tinted smoke hinted that a fine day might be awaiting the traveller beyond the radius of the city slums.

He relapsed into reverie before long, however, and Salisbury Plain reminded him of all the things he wished to forget. There was a melancholy suggestion in the bare undulations of sandy turf, the occasional group of pines, crowning a ridge or hillock in silhouette, like funeral plumes. His crime and all the grief of it stared him in the face once more.

He had passed this place with Marion on their wedding journey, and it had not struck him as depressing then; but it is a man's mood rather than his eyesight which colours what

he sees. Though Vivian's ruin had been as much upon his mind as now, there had been love to drug remorse to sleep. He had been able to gaze into a woman's face and forget that scene by the Rocking Stone. A woman's voice had drowned the weaker voice of conscience; a woman's tender trustfulness had obliterated the memory of a man's betrayal; a woman's happiness had wiped out the ugly vision of a ruined life. But to-day he was alone—alone. He had many friends, but not one confidant; numberless acquaintances who smiled in fair weather, and would turn their backs on him in the moment he confessed; and a wife who was a wife in name only, and whose estrangement tortured him every day in the week, every hour in the day. There were times when he almost wished her less virtuous than she was—a bad woman might have clung to him through all. And he loved her—he loved her, while she despised him for a villain and a coward.

With a heart-broken sigh he picked up a newspaper and tried to read. There were two men in the compartment besides himself; and although they did not know him, the instinct of habit made him screen his tell-tale face.

If Marion had not known he would have grown used, no doubt, to his state of compromise. No doctor did more than he in the way of charity. His patients who merely gave him gratitude were almost as numerous as those who paid his fees. And he did not only bestow his time, which was money, on the poor, but money as well. His name appeared on few lists of fashionable charities, which would have advertised him; but a workman with a family to keep had a story to tell of the physician who refused the proffered fee and gave him a free holiday at the seaside; a widow owed the luxuries which saved her child's life to the same source; a consumptive clerk was provided with the means to spend the winter at Davos. As fast as Garth made money he spent it in doing good. There was no need for him to save. If anything were to happen to him, Marion could provide for herself and the child. And his own peculiar code of ethics forbade him to provide for himself. He was not merely self-indulgent. He had deliberately made a bargain with Fate, and by the terms of this bargain his life and

everything that was his belonged to humanity. He seemed to be walking in a lane without a turning. Apparently there was nothing to be done but to go on or turn back, and he would not turn back.

He wondered what advice a man of another temperament would give him, a man who was neither biassed nor prejudiced by personal considerations, and would estimate him fairly: a clergyman, for instance. He was not fond of clergymen, although his brother was one; he had the mild, good-natured contempt, which the practical materialist does not always trouble to hide, for the man whose sincerity he often doubts. He respected St John because St John was so obviously and passionately in earnest; he respected the Bishop of Porthminster because the Bishop was a profound scholar, a man of proven ability, character, and power. Under the circumstances it was only natural that when he vaguely instanced "a clergyman," the Bishop materialised before his mind's eyes. St John was only a boy; the Bishop was a charitable, broad-minded man of the world. His calling had not made him intolerant. He knew as well as anyone living, of what numberless sins and weaknesses a man is made. To confess to him was the last thing Garth intended to do; but it would be easy enough to ask his advice covertly—to put the case as that of "a friend," and await the upshot. The idea fascinated him curiously. It was a feasible plan; it would cost him nothing, and he might get a little comfort out of it.

His eyes fixed themselves ahead as though he were impatient for the journey's end. It was already sunset. A sheet of flame beaten down to the horizon by sullen purple clouds had the effect of a lower world on fire, and the smoke of it. In another hour the train would reach Porthminster.

Yes, he would ask the Bishop's advice.

CHAPTER XXIII

ST JOHN'S LOVE STORY

WHILE Garth was gazing absently at the stormy sunset his brother St John was likewise employed. The train was not

due yet. It would not be in for another hour in fact, and St John stood still on the pavement as though he could not make up his mind which way to turn. Behind him was the south porch of the cathedral, before him the sleepy main street of Porthminster.

He might have been at home reading and improving his mind, or holding a skein of wool for Mrs Fairfax, but a restlessness, which rarely troubled his serene soul, had sent him out to meet Stephen an hour too soon.

If he walked down the street he would see shop windows containing the same "novelties" they had contained last month, and meet half-a-dozen acquaintances, who would ask him after the "dear Bishop," and invite him to drink tea or play golf. If he entered the cathedral he would find shadow, beauty, repose.

He turned to the cathedral. The glare in the western sky caught the marble steps and shafts; the arcade withdrew in mysterious shadow, which was alluring. A man should find peace within this portal, which the Good Shepherd guarded—solace for an aching heart, a soul's unrest.

He seemed to be alone in the building. The light fell through the coloured glass windows on a still perspective of massive piers, of groined and pointed arches, of polished marble and stone richly carved, and the solemn solitude of the place soothed him presently. It was absurd to fret and fever oneself with temporary mortal passions in this temple of God, which seemed built for all ages—massive, enduring, impregnable, like the faith which created it! When he was dead, and long turned to ashes in his grave, and all his desires were buried with him, these columns and arches would still stand; the Crucified Christ of the reredos would still gaze at Jew and Gentile and the Magdalen at His feet; the sun would still go on shining through the lancet windows on the east, and painting lozenges of blue and purple on the polished pavement which other generations trod.

"I have everything—everything that I once prayed for," said St John to himself, "and still I want more!"

He was ashamed of his ingratitude. An ascetic desire to exalt the spirit at the cost of the flesh was about to prompt a vow as foolish as ever an over-earnest young priest had made, when a

chord of heavenly music suddenly swelled through the cathedral, filling every aisle. Someone was playing the organ—someone whose identity he could guess. It was not the organist; only a woman's touch could have brought forth sounds so soft, so sweet.

St John's heart began to beat with a rapidity which made him feel faint. Forgotten was the ridiculous renunciation a morbid moment had been about to demand of him; forgotten his melancholy reflections upon Eternity and the tomb. His pale cheeks flushed; his blue eyes caught fire; quite a natural youthful animation responded to the increased circulation of the blood in his veins. After all, man was not forbidden to be happy, providing that he could be happy wholesomely, without injury to another person.

St John mounted the steps to the organ chamber, and found, as he had expected, Constance Fairfax at the organ.

"Do let me turn over the music for you," he murmured at her side.

"Certainly," said Constance calmly. "But I know it by heart."

She was dressed in brown, which suited her complexion, and she had removed her coat to give greater freedom to her arms. The fur collar linked loosely round her neck was becoming, and the brown velvet toque fitted her head with a snugness which seemed harmonious. She was looking softer and more womanly than usual. Constance was always at her best when she was playing. An undoubted talent for music could not be denied her. She had been well taught, and was indefatigable, and found more soul to put into her fingers than her manner indicated.

"I did not know you were coming here this afternoon," he said.

"I had no intention at lunch-time of coming," she replied unaffectedly, "and I don't think I have seen you since. Aren't you going to meet your brother?"

"Yes. There is plenty of time for that," he said. "I don't fidget you turning over the music."

"Not at all," said Constance.

He was pink and tremulous.

But there was

passion in the organ. The swelling chords caught him up, and tossed him aloft on waves of emotion; a strange agitation stirred his breast. He gazed at Constance's apparently unconscious face with devouring eyes.

"The subscriptions for the restoration of Carnruan Church come in very slowly," she said. "Isn't there anyone over there who can afford a handsome sum?"

"Colonel Carew is the only landowner of any consequence."

"He has already given a hundred guineas."

"Of course you know my mother's position?" he said hesitatingly.

Constance came to the end of her piece and sat resting, with her hands in her lap.

"I was not alluding to her."

"She was obliged to live upon capital till Stephen grew up. He is supporting her and my sisters now. Naturally, the little which is left will go to the girls." His voice trembled a little. "I have no private means to reckon upon. I shall never have a shilling."

"Let us hope you will never feel the want of one."

"My tastes are simple enough," said St John. "Nevertheless, sometimes I regret . . . lately in particular. . . ."

He looked down. Constance's fingers ran idly and silently over the keys of the organ.

"I think you ought to be content," she said at last; "you have everything else in your favour."

"And so I tell myself," he said ingenuously, "so I was telling myself when you began to play the organ. But a man cannot always control his desires, however presumptuous they may be. Thoughts arise which he cannot banish, his eyes covet what he has no right to regard. However much we possess there is still something which we value more than all and would make almost any sacrifice to attain!"

"If you do your best perhaps you *will* attain it some day," she said.

"It would be too much happiness," he stammered. "I dare not—dare not hope!"

Constance looking up innocently or by design, encountered the

fire of such an ardent gaze that her own drooped again at once, and a warm flush suffused her cheeks. She was a girl for all her composure.

"I am sure," she said hurriedly, "that it must be time you went to meet your brother."

"Indeed," he said, "I have been with you no longer than a quarter of an hour. But if you are offended—if you wish me to go——"

"Why should I be offended?" she asked.

"Oh—Constance!"

"Mr Garth!"

"I can't help it," said St John simply. "I love you!"

Now that he had taken the plunge which had daunted his courage for many days he could not understand why he had hesitated so long. She was not angry. What fool, indeed, but a young man in love is ever fool enough to suppose he will offend any woman by such a declaration? He had never seen her face so radiant, her eyes so bright, such a soft yet tremulous smile on the lips which were a trifle thin.

"Do you really?" she said in a low tone. "Do you really love me?"

"With all my heart! O Constance, I know I'm poor, and not good enough, but if you could—if you would——!"

His boyish diffidence and eagerness were very winning. He was always graceful, and the extended hand with the quivering fingers was more eloquent than the studied speech of another man.

No doubt Miss Fairfax had seen this moment approaching for some time, and her answer was prepared.

"I like you very much, St John," she said, blushing still deeper. "In fact—in fact, if my father is willing——"

"You will marry me!"

"Of course, we shall have to wait until you get a living," she added practically, "but—but we shall have the privilege of each other's companionship and sympathy meanwhile."

"I don't know how to thank you!" he cried, "May I——?"

"Oh, I suppose so!"

She laughed nervously, and he caught her hand and kissed her

on the cheek. Then they stood, glowing and shy, like two children who wish to talk but are afraid to begin.

"I must speak to the Bishop," said St John, with a slight tremor in his voice. "I hope he won't be angry."

"I don't think we need worry," said Constance, regaining her composure. "I am sure he would rather see me marry a man whose character and antecedents were desirable than one who was merely rich."

"But does he think me desirable?"

"My dear St John," she said in her usual superior, self-assured way, "you depreciate yourself. Is it likely my father would have invited you to become his chaplain, and live in his house with his wife and daughter, if he did not approve of you? For the rest, you are not in a position to marry at present, but you have only been ordained a short time, and my father must find you a decent living as soon as possible."

St John started like a sensitive horse at the prick of a spur.

"It would be awful if he thought——"

"But he won't think anything foolish, being a sensible man, so you needn't say it!" retorted Constance, falling over her lover's mouth with a smile. "Don't be silly, and help me to close the organ. I hear someone coming, and it is time I went home."

It was the Bishop himself who interrupted their descent from the organ chamber. He was portly, and puffed as he came upon the young people.

"I thought I should find you here, Constance. You too, Garth!"

Constance, quite self-possessed, was putting away her music in its case.

"I was just packing up to go home," she said; "I want to buy something at Blackwood's before it gets quite dark. Excuse me, father."

She gave St John a glance of encouragement, and departed, leaving the young man in a warm bath of perspiration. He knew what she meant. Now was his opportunity; he could not have a better one.

"I thought of strolling to the station to meet your brother,

Garth," said the Bishop genially. "We may as well go together. The train must be already due."

"You are very kind, sir," faltered St John.

He followed the Bishop downstairs. He could not feel as sanguine as Constance. However unworldly a man may be he has ambition for his daughter, and the only child of the Bishop of Porthminster was certainly entitled to look higher than her father's chaplain for a husband. Perhaps when he asked for her the kindness with which he had been treated would turn to grieved reproach, and he would be made to feel that he had taken advantage of his position of confidence, and that his conduct had not been dictated by the delicacy of feeling and good taste to be expected of a man so placed.

An agony of self-distrust and humiliation already possessed the unhappy St John. His lips were dry, his tongue cleaved to the roof of his mouth. Constance had left them on purpose that he might speak to her father. She would expect everything to be settled when they met again. She had such a high moral standard; anything like secrecy would be abhorrent to her; and it would pain her, and perhaps lower her opinion of him, if he had not the courage to inform her father immediately of his aspirations.

More than ever did those aspirations seem the sublimity of impudence! How he could have dared to tell his love, to kiss Constance Fairfax as though she were a mere ordinary girl, appeared inconceivable to him. But she had welcomed his devotion, she had permitted his salute! St John drew a long breath, and the colour came back to his face. If the Bishop would only consent to their engagement she was his, this incomparable prize, this jewel of women, this pearl above price! She loved him. Surely such a victory should inspire a man with spirit to perform any deed of valour—even one as great as asking the Bishop of Porthminster to give his daughter to a young minister who had only been ordained a few months.

These thoughts had raced through his mind so quickly that they were no farther than the bottom of the stairs. The sun had disappeared by this time, and the dusk which was creeping

through the cathedral drew a kindly veil over poor St John's embarrassment.

Under the central tower the Bishop glanced upward. The cathedral was modern, and the groined roof of the architect's plan was still absent for lack of funds.

"I hope," he said, "to be able to finish that roof myself next year if nobody else comes forward meanwhile. I should like to see my cathedral complete. Who says we have no architects and craftsmen nowadays! I am not ashamed of our little Porthminster Cathedral when I view the masterpieces of Westminster and York."

"It is a beautiful edifice," absently responded St John, who was thinking of the beauty of a girl's face, and his own audacity in desiring to possess it. The Bishop had paused, and it seemed that now or never was his opportunity to speak. "I—I beg your pardon, sir," he added with a rush, "may I—er—speak to you for a moment?"

"Why you are speaking to me, are you not?" asked the Bishop, with a quizzical smile on his kind, humorous face.

"I mean about—about a private matter, sir, of—of the greatest importance to me?"

"Certainly," said the Bishop, growing grave in the expectation of advice or pardon to be bestowed in the matter of some youthful peccadillo. "Take your time, lad."

"If I don't get it out quickly I shall never have the courage to speak at all!" confessed St John, with that boyish ingenuousness which was one of his chief charms. "I don't know what you'll say, sir; I—I am in love with your daughter."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Bishop.

"You may consider I have taken advantage of your great goodness in permitting me to enter your family circle, and that—that I ought to be ashamed of myself in fact," pursued St John, accusing himself dolefully, "but—but I could not help divulging my feelings to Miss Constance just now in the organ chamber——"

"So that was why you were both so red when I appeared!" commented the Bishop. "I might have suspected something! What did Constance say to you?"

"She is willing, sir, providing you will give us your consent."

The Bishop was walking slowly towards the door, his hands behind him, and his eyes bent on the pavement.

"Then I am to consider you wish to marry my daughter," he said presently, "and that she wishes to marry you?"

St John emitted a husky sound which was evidently intended for an affirmative, and sixty seconds which seemed interminable passed in silence. The Bishop looked up at last. His countenance was mild, even benign, and the tension of St John's nerves relaxed.

"I like your diffidence, my lad," he said, "but you need not have been afraid to speak of this to me. What more could any girl ask, or any right-minded parents desire for her, than the honest love of an honest man? It may ease your mind to learn that your confession is not such news to me as you suppose. Mothers are very quick at reading signs and tokens connected with affairs of the heart, and my wife warned me some time ago that an affection was springing up between you and Constance. If I had intended to interfere I should have sent you away then. But what right have I to do so? Constance is a sensible girl, of an age to choose for herself, and the liking I have always had for you, St John, has increased with your residence under my roof. I have known you from boyhood; I know your mother and sisters, and above all your brother, who so highly deserves the esteem and renown he has won. I could not desire happier connections for my daughter. Under such circumstances"—the Bishop's eyes twinkled—"I am afraid I cannot withhold my consent."

"Oh, sir, how can I thank you!" exclaimed St John. "Indeed, I do not know how to express my gratitude and happiness!"

"Perhaps you will be able to express it satisfactorily to Constance," said the Bishop, smiling. "Come, lad, we must hasten to meet the train."

CHAPTER XXIV

A CONFIDENTIAL CHAT

DINNER was over at the Palace; the ladies had withdrawn from the table, and left the men to the enjoyment of that sociable half-

hour over wine and tobacco which is the foundation of many friendships.

A couple of young men—nephews of Mrs Fairfax—were also staying in the house, and it was natural it should fall to St John's lot to entertain them, while Stephen, the guest of the evening, conversed with the Bishop.

The contrast between the two brothers had never been more marked than to-night. St John, in the best of spirits, was excellent company. His sparkling wit, which was never satirical or unkind, kept his young companions in a roar. Stephen, on the contrary, was quiet and grave. Always somewhat serious in social intercourse, this evening he could not disguise his utter weariness of spirit. A man so occupied and so earnest could not find either time or inclination for the flowers or froth of speech. He was not talkative like St John; but when he did open his lips he had something to say which was listened to with respect. It was his profession to act silently, expeditiously, coolly, as much as it was St John's to obtain influence by personal attraction, to appeal to the emotions which govern the average mind, to practise the eloquence of voice and phrase. Each had chosen according to his temperament.

Fortunately, Garth's visible depression passed for fatigue. Everybody knew he worked hard, although few knew how hard that was, and the Bishop regarded him with the sympathetic kindness an old soldier with well-earned repose in sight might be expected to feel towards the young soldier still in the thick of the fight.

Therefore when Garth had declined another glass of wine the Bishop rose and led the way to his study.

"We'll leave the lads to amuse the ladies," he said almost affectionately, "and smoke the pipe of peace together. I mean this holiday of yours to be a real rest, Garth. I can see you want one. You must go to bed early, and get up late, and do just as you like without reference to anyone."

"My dear Bishop, you are indeed a splendid host for a tired man," replied Garth, smiling. "I avoid most invitations to country houses with wholesome dread, knowing I should return to London far more fatigued by gaiety than I could ever have

been by work. I confess I do not feel equal to making myself agreeable in the drawing-room this evening. Our strong Cornish air after the exhausted atmosphere of London has reminded me how little sleep I had last night. Besides," he added, "I am particularly anxious for a chat with you."

"That is strange," said the Bishop, smiling in his turn, "because I happen to be also anxious for a chat with you! Let me recommend that easy-chair. The cigars are at your elbow."

Garth settled himself restfully, and lighted a cigar. The Bishop took the opposite chair. A carved stool with the matches and ash tray stood on the hearthrug between them, and a bright fire blazed in the generous grate.

The room was handsome and luxurious, and outside the drawn window-curtains was a dark and chilly night. Physical comfort did not always impress itself upon Garth; his materialism was of a kind that no flesh-pots of Egypt could satisfy; still less was he a snob. But he could not help realising suddenly that it was pleasant to be the friend of a Bishop, to be the honoured guest in this magnificent abode. For some reason his thoughts, previously occupied with his personal interest in the story he was about to tell, wandered to Robert Browning's poem, "Bishop Blougram's Apology," and with a gleam of humour he wondered what advice he would receive if Blougram, not Fairfax, were sitting here. Some interesting speculations might have rewarded his enterprise in search of them, if he had not been both too depressed and too wearied to encourage feats of the imagination.

"I wonder if, by any chance," resumed the Bishop, "our subject of discussion is the same?"

"It is unlikely," said Garth. "I wished to ask your advice—your indulgent advice—for a friend of mine. I know, from St John's letters, how kind you have been to him, and how much sympathy you have for young men, who frequently yield to temptations which——"

"You have spoken to St John since your arrival?" interrupted the Bishop, quickly.

Garth paused a moment. His thoughts were in reality so far away from St John, whose name he had introduced merely to

pave the way by a compliment to the Bishop, that he had some difficulty in responding to the question.

"I have had no opportunity for a confidential chat with him yet, if that is what you mean, sir," he replied.

"I thought not," said the Bishop complacently. He beamed at his guest with a kindness which puzzled Garth. "It is all right. He made his confession this afternoon, and I have forgiven him."

"Made his confession!" repeated Garth, now thoroughly mystified.

The Bishop laughed outright.

"I must not speak in parables, I see. You precise man of medicine will not follow my flights of speech, and I am alarming you on your brother's account! I merely alluded to his attachment to my daughter, which he may have confided to you in his letters. This very afternoon our young people came to an agreement without consulting me."

"My brother St John has proposed to Miss Fairfax!" cried Garth.

He was astonished. His own carefully rehearsed speech went right out of his mind, and he stared at the Bishop for confirmation of such startling news, almost expecting him to admit that it was only a joke.

"You are surprised? You did not imagine that things had gone so far?" asked the Bishop, too engrossed in his theme to imagine Garth's speech had been the prelude to quite another subject.

"I must confess," said Garth, "that I *am* surprised. The young gentleman has had some courage," he added, "to presume to think of matrimony so early in his career!"

"And yet," said the Bishop mildly, "it is springtime with both of them. Why should we wonder? The lad was very fair, very modest in his request to me, and I thanked God that my daughter had had the sense to choose so well. I trust the alliance of our families will give as much pleasure to you, Garth, as to me."

"My dear Bishop," said Garth, genuinely moved, "you have really consented to my brother's engagement to your daughter!

How can I express the gratitude I feel on his behalf? It is really too good of you. He is evidently born under a lucky star—to meet with so much better fortune than he deserves!”

“No, not better than he deserves,” said the Bishop. “Seriously, Garth, you need have no anxiety on his account. You did not imagine, surely, that I should think of raising any objection to their union on mere worldly grounds? Constance is not a foolish, flighty girl. She knows well what she does in electing to become the wife of a poor man, and if love seems to her more than sufficient recompense for the luxuries she must forego on leaving home, I cannot but praise her for her choice. For the rest, I am fond of him both for his own sake and for yours, and I value a suitable connection far more highly than wealth. His own character is above reproach, and is he not the brother of Dr Stephen Garth, whose name is a passport to the favour of all sensible men?”

“You rate me too highly, sir,” said Garth, whose eyes were bent upon the fire. “I should feel more comfortable if you judged St John on his own merits alone.”

“It is you who are too modest,” replied the Bishop, smiling. “No, I cannot disassociate you from each other! He is your brother. It is for you, the head of the family, to set the general tone; it is to you that one looks for the high example which affects the whole tenor of the younger lives! What you have made yourself cannot but affect your brother. Do you not realise that if you had been a failure, worthless, St John’s youth could not have been as unsullied as it has been? His character has formed itself in the sunshine of a sheltered life, untainted by evil associations. Your standard of morality has been unconsciously absorbed by him while he was yet too young to rely upon himself. You were his ideal. His love and admiration for you, I know, is above the usual brotherly love. He is never tired of talking to me of the good influence you have exercised over him, and the good advice you have given him many times. If he belonged to an undesirable family, do you think I should have so much pleasure in admitting him to mine? I am confident respecting the happiness of my daughter’s future, because I know that the shadow of disillusion, of disgrace, of evil, will never fall

upon her, that she will always be surrounded by love and honour."

Garth still gazed at the fire. He no longer thought of asking the Bishop's advice.

CHAPTER XXV

THE LOWERED BLINDS

TREGENNA dismissed the dog-cart and prepared to walk home. He thought he would make a custom of walking home for a few weeks. He was putting on flesh and needed exercise.

It was one of those winter days which occur sometimes in the west country to remind God's earth of the promise of spring. The wind, which had been pretty high for twenty-four hours or so, had dropped entirely, the sun had appeared, and a summer silence dwelt on hill and dale. The lights and shadows revealed unexpected beauties. What had been a bleak and colourless dawn became a green upland, dimpled with hollows where ferns were already sprouting and gorse breaking into yellow bud; the sheep bells seemed to tinkle a joyous welcome to the sun; the overcast sky cleared by magic, and the grey sea turned blue.

Summer or winter was all the same to Tregenna; he had no eye for natural beauties—of landscape—and his tough hide was indifferent alike to heat and to cold. He was preoccupied too, this morning, and hungry, and hoped dinner had not been forgotten because his wife was ill. Prudence was very ill. There was no mistake about it this time, and no hesitation, even on her own part, in calling in the doctor. The good health which followed her attack had not lasted long. Her attack of indigestion, as she had called it, had returned, and her state, serious from the beginning, had rapidly become worse.

Rachel, who had come to see her at once, was nursing her night and day, in spite of Tregenna's objections. She would not let him hire a nurse—Prudence hated strangers about her, and would not even let one of the servants take the night watch from her, although Tregenna, in a fever that she would break down,

had complained to Mrs Garth of her folly. The girl would listen to nobody ; Prudence needed her, and whatever was to be done for her would be done by nobody as carefully and conscientiously as by herself. If the woman had been her own mother, or dearly loved sister, she could not have shown more passionate devotion to her charge. Even the doctor had complained several times of the fatigue to which she was exposed, while admitting that never in his experience had he come across an amateur nurse who showed such qualities of good sense and self-denial.

Poor Prudence's condition was now critical in the extreme. During the last day or two a sort of hectic fever had come upon her, and she was threatened by collapse from exhaustion.

Tregenna pursued his way absent-mindedly at a slow pace. No doubt the house was not very cheerful, and he was not in a hurry to get home. Prudence suffered a great deal at times with violent neuralgic pains, and her groans were not pleasant company ; and Rachel, if he managed to catch a glimpse of her at all, averted a cold face, pale with anxiety and fatigue, and would not look at him. Only this morning, when he had asked after Prudence, she had almost refused to answer, and showed even more plainly than usual that it horrified her to remain in the same room with him. In spite of this Tregenna, infatuated to the point of insanity, could not cease to care for her. She was still the desire of his eyes, the mainspring of his thoughts.

He did not show himself unfeeling towards his wife, sending a messenger from the mine to inquire after her several times a day, assuring Rachel constantly that no expense was to be spared in procuring everything which could alleviate the sick woman's sufferings, and expressing his willingness to have a physician from Plymouth, or even from London, the instant Dr Manners considered the case to be beyond his experience.

All the same, there had been no further advice called in, in spite of the vehement appeal of Rachel, who would have had the whole college of physicians in consultation at Prudence's bedside. Dr Manners was young, with confidence in himself, and having had several cases lately presenting similar symptoms, felt himself as competent as another man to prescribe for Mrs

Tregenna. On his early visit this morning, however, he had become alarmed, and expressed the desire to share the responsibility of so serious a case with an older head. Tregenna had promptly despatched a telegram to Plymouth, thereby earning the first glance of commendation Rachel had given him throughout, and a reply had been received, bidding them expect the physician's arrival by the afternoon train. The question was: Had not the further advice been called in too late?

The position of the sun told Tregenna that he would be late for dinner if he loitered longer on the way, and he disliked overdone beef—as much as he disliked under-done mutton. The cooking had decidedly fallen off since Prudence took to her bed; he admitted that. He wondered how she was, and what the Plymouth doctor would say this afternoon. It was depressing to hear her moans. He hated illness about him. It would be a blessing when it was over, one way or the other. . . .

He reached the house at this moment, and glanced at the upper windows. Rachel was pulling down the blinds.

CHAPTER XXVI

TWO VISITORS

"MAY I give you another cup of coffee?" asked Marion.

"Thank you, I have finished," replied Garth.

Breakfast, on the table punctually at 8.30, was over before nine. As usual, husband and wife hardly exchanged a dozen words—he busy, or feigning to be busy, with his letters; she calmly thoughtful over her coffee and egg.

He rose from the table, and, as at a signal, the child was brought in to say good-morning to his father. Little Robert was a bonny boy—a big, fair, straight-limbed child, with Marion's colouring and Garth's eyes. Garth's face lightened at once. The child was the one soul on earth who could always raise his spirits and draw a smile from him, and make the man, for a moment, what he should have been.

He caught the boy, and held him aloft.

"Well, Bobbit, have you been a good boy, and eaten all your bread and milk?"

The child waved a chubby fist, and gurgled and crowed.

"He looks well, nurse," said the doctor.

"Yes, sir; I never saw a finer child for his age. I really believe he'll begin to walk soon. His legs are so firm and strong."

"You are a precocious young man, eh?" said Garth, tossing the child again. "You'll soon be as big as your dada. Who has been putting your hair in curl papers, I should like to know?"

The nurse, who was a lady, and dressed in neat white cotton and muslin cap, smiled at father and son.

"Your dada knows the curls are natural, doesn't he, Bobbit? He is only teasing you."

"And what cheeks," said Garth, "like peaches! Oh, you are a bonny boy, you are; there never was such a boy—nor will be again, I am sure!" he added, with a sudden humorous smile at his own paternal pride.

He cast a tentative, almost appealing glance at Marion. On this subject at least she might be sympathetic. But she was rearranging the vases of flowers about the room, and neither spoke nor responded with her eyes.

It was always the same. He was always making these shots at her heart which failed to reach the mark, always trying to win an affectionate word or look from her in vain, always endeavouring to draw her towards him, and escape, if only for a moment, this dreary isolation of the soul.

And while she remained adamant, killing his advances with an apparent unconsciousness more effectual than anger would have been, his sensitiveness never ceased. A snub from her to-day hurt him just as much as it had done a year ago. Their estrangement never ceased to cause him the deepest pain and humiliation—none the less that he dared not complain of it. To appeal to her outright would be to court reproaches which he could not bear. It was only the silence which made their residence together possible.

Even his pleasure in the child seemed killed by her aloofness.

He put the boy in the nurse's arms.

"Dada has a great many letters to write this morning, Bobbit. He is such a busy dada."

He went off to his study, and Marion, left alone, raised her face from the flowers.

"Oh, Lord," she said, "how long—how long?"

Garth attended to his correspondence, giving appointments, replying to questions of country patients, writing a few rather long letters to fellow medical men concerning the treatment of cases they had sent to him, until ten o'clock. From that hour until one he was "at home" for consultation, and a steady stream of patients began to flow in.

The whole of the entrance floor, with the exception of the back dining-room, was given up to professional use. The large front room of the gaunt Harley Street house was furnished as a waiting-room with substantial furniture, and Marion had not tried to make it artistic, but had been content to make it comfortable and handsome. A ceiling of immense height and walls without an alcove, did not lend themselves readily to decorative purposes. There were easy-chairs and lounges, a Turkey carpet, and journals. Garth's consulting-room was equally plain and utilitarian. But the hall and staircase, which had been practically remodelled, made it evident that the house belonged to people of taste as well as means.

At the termination of each interview Garth made notes, in a sort of diary, upon the case for future reference, before touching the electric bell which would admit a new patient. At one o'clock he lunched; at two he was already in his brougham or victoria on the way to his hospitals and private consultations. It was then only that he had time to glance at a newspaper or a book, and he never failed to find a copy of *The Times* and the particular work he was reading ready to his hand. He knew well enough whom he had to thank for this little attention, and numberless others, trivial and great, of the same kind. No servant could be as intelligent and thoughtful as Marion. It was her way. In all such matters she was a perfect wife. Her memory never failed her where his material welfare was concerned; he never had to ask twice for anything he required—rarely, indeed, to ask at all.

She seemed to divine his needs without a word, to read his thoughts at times ; but he knew if he were to kiss her she would walk out of his house.

Although he loved the boy deeply, a mere infant could not fill the place her withdrawal left vacant. It was to ambition he turned more and more, to his dream of becoming one of the benefactors of humanity. And as his heart contracted his intellect grew. The bed-rock of his nature, polished by a peculiar affliction, acquired the hardness and brilliancy of a diamond. To feel was to suffer, therefore he endeavoured to feel no more, only to *know*. He did as much as ever in the way of charity, he was as earnest and painstaking as ever in his work, he was even more anxious than ever to discover the cure which was to preserve so many lives, but even Bobbit's little fingers only reached the outer chamber of his heart. He was not one of those men who can pass over the mother for the child. For Marion alone was that inner sanctuary, now and for all his life. He made plans, nevertheless, for the boy's future. On his head at least the sorrows of the parents should never fall. Marion would not tell her son how his father had sinned : she loved her child too well. But as Bobbit grew older his happiness would be bound to entail some sacrifice on both of them. There would come a day when the boy would begin to notice and understand what went on around him, when curiosity would dawn in his eyes, and when that day came he would have to be sent away from the blighted home which would blight his impressionable years, until he was old enough to pursue his own amusements, choose his own associates and friends.

It was not a cheerful prospect. But for years the boy would still be a child, happy and unquestioning, and it was useless to anticipate pain. The evil of the days as they came was certainly sufficient.

Garth, who had been holding a new German treatise on tuberculosis upside down, found that the brougham had stopped, and jumped out. Thank God, there was work, work, always work ! The encouragement of his affections could only bring pain. There was satisfaction alone in the exercise of his keen faculties, the consciousness of scientific victory, the hope of doing still more than he had already done.

As usual, he only returned just in time to change for dinner—a habit he never neglected, however tired he might be. It would not have occurred to him to be less courteous to his wife than to other women—to his wife, whom he respected more than any woman in the world. Every evening, unless an inevitable engagement took one or both of them out, they faced each other across the white table-cloth, the silver, and the flowers. Marion, as punctilious as he, dressed with no less care and taste than when he was her lover; indeed, if she had been quite alone she would have changed her gown for dinner just the same, out of respect for herself. She was innately a gentlewoman.

"I am expecting a visit this evening from Sir Theophilus Garven, the Head of the British Medical Association," remarked Garth.

"Indeed!" said Marion. "Would you like him shown into the drawing-room?"

"Will you be at home? If so, you might like to meet him?"

"As you please," she responded. "It is all the same to me."

The man-servant had gone out of the room, and Garth looked at her with a spark of passion.

"You no longer express a taste or distaste for anything on earth!"

"I do not pay much attention to trifles, it is true."

"Then you do not wish to meet Sir Theophilus?"

"You put a speech into my mouth which I did not utter," she said. "I have sufficient acquaintances for my own sake, but I am always willing, as you know, to make new ones for yours."

The reply was so even-tempered, so reasonable, he could not complain of it, and yet she had contrived to sting him, throughout the brief conversation, as she had learned so well how to do.

He gave orders for the distinguished visitor to be shown into the library, a small room lined with books, on the half landing, and disappeared directly after dinner. He was proud of Marion; he liked to be able to introduce a wife so beautiful, so graceful, so intelligent, so well bred, in whose manner and appearance his eyes could perceive no flaw. But there were times, and this was one of them, when she aroused him to resentment by this icy self-possession, when his temper set hard, and his firmness

became an obstinacy which neither God nor man could move. She would not relax--no, not for an instant! Why should he be perpetually trying her, tempting her, appealing for a mercy she never gave? If she had a right to her attitude, he had some right to a little pride. He could not always accept her cold charity without wincing and remembering that he had had no need to beg once.

Marion heard Sir Theophilus Garven come, but she was left in undisturbed possession of the drawing-room. She opened the piano, but closed it again without touching the keys. Her fondness for music had gone with other tastes of her girlhood. The great fire for ever burning within her seemed to have consumed all the things she used to care for. Her days, as a rule, were well filled and methodical. A woman weak enough to sit down idly and brood would have been incapable of living her life at all. This evening, however, she felt used up. Twice to-day her will and her husband's had clashed: it was something of a record, and a painful one. It was not quarrels that she sought, or anything like them, and this perpetual guardedness was painful enough to her as well as to him, God knows.

She went upstairs presently to look at Bobbit. He was asleep, peaceful and smiling, the flush of perfect health upon his cheeks. What a crowning joy this child would have added to a perfect marriage if his father had been what she had thought him once! As it was, whenever they looked at him they must think of each other, and what had been. The poor baby seemed born to be both the comfort and the torture of two broken hearts.

She longed to kiss the child, but was not selfish enough to wake him. She just touched one chubby fist with her lips, and left him, sighing, to return to the empty drawing-room. She fancied as she did so that she heard the library door open, and she was not mistaken. Footsteps and voices ascended the stairs, and her husband entered the drawing-room accompanied by an old gentleman of distinguished appearance, with a fine-featured, clean-shaven professional face, covered by innumerable fine lines, and crowned by iron-grey hair.

She saw at a glance that Stephen was flushed and animated by some news which had pleased him very much, and looking

almost happy, as he did, the strong resemblance between him and the child she had just left had never been more marked. It was evident he was absorbed by the moment and careless of what had occurred between them over dinner.

"Sir Theophilus Garven wishes to make your acquaintance, Marion," he said.

"He has heard so much of the charming Mrs Garth," replied the old physician gallantly, "and is no longer surprised at it. Your husband is a fortunate man, ma'am!"

"Do you think so?" responded Marion, with a painful smile.

"So talented, still so young, and the husband of such a wife! Indeed, he is to be envied. My mission this evening is a selfish one, I fear. I have been inviting him to address the next meeting of the British Medical Association on the subject of tuberculosis."

Despite herself, Marion could not refrain from glancing at Garth with a brief flash of pleasure. She knew what this meant as well as he did, and could understand his triumphant expression. No higher recognition of his authority on his chosen subject of study could be given him. Henceforward he would take his place among the leading scientists of the day.

Her heart beat fast. She averted her eyes, which expressed too much.

"It is a great compliment to my husband," she said, "and I am sure he appreciates it."

"It is no greater compliment than he deserves. Few among us can compare with Dr Garth," said Sir Theophilus kindly. "I, for one, await his address with the greatest interest."

He remained for some time talking to Marion and Garth, especially to Marion, who seemed to have taken his fancy greatly. Her beautiful form and features, the invariable intelligence of her questions and replies, her well-informed mind and evident culture, rarely failed, indeed, to make a favourable impression. And this evening, as though realising the value of such a friend for her husband, and in atonement for her former indifference on the subject, she was at her best without any visible exertion to please.

Garth watched her with warm gratitude—the bitter feelings

she had aroused in him earlier in the evening quite gone. And when Sir Theophilus had taken his leave, with the hope that they would soon meet again, he cried impulsively :

"I want to thank you!"

"It is unnecessary."

"This is a recognition worth having, is it not?"

"It seems to me you are at the top of the tree. You must have great talents ; but then I never doubted it. I hope your early success will not make you—make you relax your efforts."

"Make me vain, you mean!" he said, smiling. "No, because I am so well aware that I am even a better man than they think me—that I have still more force in reserve! Yes, I say it myself! I never saw the value of humility. In this world the convincing manner which can proceed from self-appreciation alone goes a long way, and there is no spur like the realisation of one's own ability. The man who succeeds is the man who believes in himself. Oh, I shall astonish them yet, you will see! What is the matter, Drummond?"

The butler had appeared, and stood waiting at the door.

"A man to see you, sir."

"A patient, do you mean?"

"No, sir ; he says he comes on business."

Garth, who had dropped into an easy-chair, felt disinclined to move.

"I don't know what it is, Marion. He might as well come up."

He nodded to the servant, who withdrew and returned with the nameless visitor.

It was Vivian who entered the room.

They did not recognise him instantly. He had grown a beard, which had completely changed the character of his face, and he was wearing his hair differently. Nobody spoke until the servant had withdrawn. In the interval Marion perceived, with a gnawing at her heart, why the butler had not called the visitor a gentleman. Vivian had deteriorated visibly. He still wore the suit of clothes which Garth had given him, and they were shiny at the seams ; his hat was shabby, his boots shapeless ; his old manner—the Oxford manner—was quite gone. It was succeeded by a furtive, hangdog air. The man had been living a hunted

life, afraid of every footstep, suspicious of every friend, since they had seen him last, and he showed it. He looked ill, too. The rims of his eyes were pink; his complexion blotchy. He had been drinking, Garth perceived, to drown his cares—or add to them. It was a painful sight.

Marion was the first to greet the outcast.

"Vivian!" she cried, and gave both hands to him, and kissed him on the cheek as she had done at Poldinnick when he came before. "Where have you been? What have you been doing? How is it we have heard nothing of you for so long?"

"I have been away," he answered. "How are you, Garth? I have been to Ireland."

"Why Ireland?"

"I had a chance of going, and I didn't think they'd be likely to look for me there. It was no good. I've had a rough time. I held out as long as I could, getting an odd job sometimes; but I've come back to you like a bad penny, you see!"

"It was unwise to return to England," said Marion breathlessly. "You should have written. You should have written before."

"I wanted to come back," he said. "I'm—I'm home-sick, Marion." His bloodshot eyes grew moist. "Will you lend me a hundred pounds?"

"I will do more than that for you, Vivian."

"I intend to go to America, and try to work my way a bit," he said. "Lots of fellows find something to do in America, and I'm not particular what it is."

His voice as well as his manner and appearance had deteriorated, as though he had been associating with people of low class, and had already begun to forget how gentlemen speak.

All this Garth observed with his relentless keenness and fastidiousness, and Marion as plainly, but with far different feelings. While to her Vivian was an object of intense grief and compassion, to Garth he had become the mere representation of a type—a human specimen under the microscope. Even in his presence the doctor was able to realise that his victim's fate did not excite him to nearly as much pity as formerly. That time at Poldinnick, he had felt hot with shame, embarrassed, sore at

heart ; this evening he remained cool and in perfect possession of his faculties. He was growing used to the relative positions they occupied. Those positions, indeed, seemed almost natural—the “survival of the fittest” exemplified.

“Would you not have a better chance in Canada or Australia?” he suggested, quite quietly and sincerely. “I think the Americans swallow up all the good things themselves, Vivian. Life in the Colonies isn’t so much a trial of wits as of patience and industry.”

He had expressed the frank opinion, in as many words, that Vivian was a fool, but the young man was not offended.

“I daresay you are right,” he said. “I’ll think it over. But I must see Rachel first.”

He was evidently resolved on this point, and Garth’s brows contracted. He did not approve of the proposition ; he wanted Rachel to forget her old lover. But it was difficult to interfere with Marion present. He hoped she would do so herself, and she did make a remark after a moment’s hesitation.

“She often speaks of you when we are alone.”

“What does she think, Marion?”

Garth, as well as the other man, waited with visible suspense.

“She still believes you innocent, and she loves you with all her heart,” replied Marion distinctly. “You need not fear any misfortune will ever make her desert you. She will remain true to you while you remain worthy of her.”

Garth walked to the fire, and leaned his elbow on the mantelshelf, hiding his face. Vivian looked up glowing.

“I *will* be worthy of her,” he said, deeply moved. “If I have been letting myself go a bit it has been through the force of circumstances. I have been obliged to hide among the herd, and bad habits are catching. But I’ll pull up—” he squared his shoulders—“if she’ll give me something to live for.”

Marion caught her breath.

“Yes, go and see Rachel. And then—work, Vivian. Think what a triumph to rise above such wrongs as yours ! Don’t let them embitter you ; regard them rather as a spur. No misfortune can touch a man so long as he retains a brave heart and a clear conscience. After all, our lives are largely what we make them. Heaven and hell are within one’s own breast.”

"I have lost place, name, friends, fortune. I am no philosopher, Marion."

"But you have no weight upon your mind, no curse of evil upon your soul," she urged vehemently. "If men have injured you, God is on your side." Her voice rang like a clarion note. "Oh, I would rather stand in your place—outcast as you are—than in the place of the man who made you the scapegoat of his crime!"

As she finished speaking she looked at her husband, whose eyes were fixed upon her. Garth was very pale.

Vivian, on the contrary, flushed, noticing nothing of this by-play. Her spirit had inspired him for the moment; but, alas! only for the moment.

"How you speak!" he whispered. "If I had you with me always I should think it possible to be happy still."

"Remember Rachel," she said, "and play a man's part. You have her to consider as well as yourself. You cannot call yourself deserted while a girl like that loves you."

"And while I have two such friends as you and Stephen!" he cried. "You are right. I have *something* to be grateful for."

"I want to help you to a fair start," she said. "You may draw on me for any substantial purpose up to ten thousand pounds. Purchase a share in some suitable business, buy land—I think you are an out-of-door man, Vivian—but let me know what the investment is to be before you engage yourself."

"Ten thousand pounds!" exclaimed Vivian. "You will lend me ten thousand pounds! But I might lose it all."

"It will be a free gift, not a loan. Have we not been brother and sister all our lives?"

"What do you say to it, Stephen?"

"My wife's money is her own," said Garth automatically, "and if she had none I would gladly help you myself."

"You shall have five hundred pounds in cash, Vivian," she said. "I will give you all the money there is in the house. Tell me where to send the rest."

"Send it to Post Restante at the General Post Office," he said, "addressed to George Clements, and I will call for it. How good you are, Marion! How can I thank you?"

Between them Marion and Garth collected forty pounds, which she handed to Vivian.

"I have not seen so much money for a long time," he said, "and yet I am a rich man's only son. I wonder if the day will ever come when I shall be able to show my face at Poldinnick again?"

"God knows," said Marion in a low tone which vibrated with deep emotion. "I pray for it always."

It was impossible to ask him to remain. His visit must arouse no curiosity among the servants. He buttoned the bank notes inside his shabby coat, and presently wished them good-bye and went his way. London did not seem such a hive of enemies now he had money. He left the house, and walked up Harley Street into the Marylebone Road with renewed courage and energy. Marion had done him good. It was so much to be assured that Rachel loved him still.

CHAPTER XXVII

WHAT HAPPENED AT CARNRUAN

TREGENNA had gone very correctly into mourning for his wife, and the finest monument in St Ruth churchyard reminded the passer-by of her many virtues in appropriate verse. The verse itself was none of his doing; he was no hypocrite, in trifles at anyrate. He had left the whole business to the monumental sculptors at Plymouth, contenting himself with the mere selection of the design, a plain granite cross which somehow suited the single-minded honesty and the good heart of the woman who was dead.

The rose which had been planted beside the monument was already three months old this afternoon, and Tregenna was on his way to Carnruan to see Rachel. They had met many times, of course, since poor Prudence's death, but always in company; and the widower had avoided seeking her with more decency both of feeling and of breeding than Rachel had expected. Perhaps he had felt that he could afford to wait a while, having the game, so to speak, in his own hands at last. But his patience had

gradually exhausted itself. What was the good of keeping her in a state of suspense and himself in a state of restlessness? He wondered that he had waited so long, as he walked across the fields after a rough meal at the mine.

His happiness was scarcely happiness, it was mere excitement, for he knew that she hated him. The sight of him would blanch her cheeks. Those black eyes of hers had expressed her feelings so many times without disguise that he had no chance of self-deception. If she married him it would be because she was afraid to break her promise, and she would resist to the end, with her sullen looks, her flashes of passion, the aversion she would not conceal.

To the man's temper, by no means peculiar, there would be a certain pleasure in conquering that resistance. He had been overcoming obstacles with his dogged patience and perseverance, his indomitable will, since he began life as a lad. Experience had taught him by this time that many things which seem impossible prove otherwise when properly attacked. He had some excuse, indeed, for this self-confidence. At twenty years old he had been a man of the people, illiterate, ill informed, with nothing in the world more substantial than a determination to succeed, and at thirty-six he was in possession of a large fortune, and a certain status, among business people at anyrate. Already too, he perceived signs of a more general acknowledgment of his existence socially. It was true that poor Prudence had been a drawback to his reception by the "county." The man was possible alone; his roughness might pass for rugged worth, and his common-sense was undeniable. His money would gild a great deal. It might even sugar the pill Rachel had to swallow. He contemplated this view tolerantly, without vanity. It was beyond his hope that she would fall in love with him.

It was dark when he reached The Haven, and he paused a moment outside to contemplate her home. How many hopes and fears and burning desires of his had centred in that house! But his position was secure at last; he stood on legitimate ground now that he could offer to marry her.

There was a lamp burning in the parlour, the curtains of which were undrawn, and he could see Rachel and Mamie Garth sitting

beside the yellow shade. Rachel glanced up presently, as though she felt the eyes of the unseen watcher upon her, and her profile caught the light.

Tregenna turned abruptly to the door and rang.

It happened that Vivian did not meet a soul during his walk to Carnruan, and if his heart was beating faster than usual it was with joyous anticipation, not with fear. What a surprise his visit would be to Rachel!

The gate at The Haven always creaked, and he did not wish to be heard. Furthermore, the entrance was visible from several windows of rooms in common use, and nobody but Rachel must see him. Knowing the house so well, he had no difficulty in selecting the safest place for entrance. He skirted the garden wall, scaled it at the back of the house, and dropped silently among the shrubs.

Her bedroom window was just above his head, and unless he could contrive to attract her attention before, he would have to remain in hiding until she retired for the night, and then throw a stone up.

Drawn by a stream of light from the parlour, he made his way towards it presently, in the hope of catching a glimpse of her. In a way his movements were a repetition of Tregenna's, although Tregenna had not taken so much trouble to avoid detection, as he had no cause to fear it. To Vivian's disappointment, however, only Mamie and Mrs Garth were in the room, and after watching them for a moment he continued his search for Rachel.

A couple of large old box bushes stood like stolid sentinels on each side of the dining-room window, and in their shadow he was able to approach quite close without risk of being seen. This room was lighted too, and crouching among the shrubs, with his hand grasping a gnarled branch of ivy, he raised his face to the level of the sill.

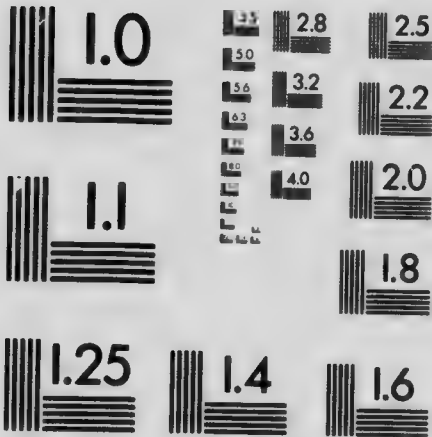
His caution had not been thrown away, he perceived that at a glance. Rachel was in the room, but not alone. There was a man with her—a man whose face he could not see at first—whom he recognised with surprise at last as John Tregenna.

As it happened, he had come across the announcement of



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Mrs Tregenna's death quite recently in an old newspaper, and Tregenna's black suit and the strangeness of his presence there alone with Rachel reminded him of it now. Unaware of a witness, they were engaged in apparently earnest conversation. They stood by the table at the farther end of the room, and something in the man's manner, in the girl's attitude of embarrassment and downcast face, struck a chill to Vivian's heart.

It could not be possible that Tregenna was making love to her! And yet—and yet——

He was flushed; he bent eagerly towards her; his great hand rested upon her arm! And she stood still listening; she did not show him the door!

So this was the fidelity which was to console the old lover, to lift him out of the mire, to give him something to live for! Vivian was suffocating. A dizziness came over him. Through a mist he saw Tregenna take her in his arms and kiss her.

CHAPTER XXVIII

MAMIE'S OPINIONS

A WILD screeching of gulls announced the invasion of their particular domain, and Mamie Garth scrambled up the cliff. Her exploit, perceived from above, was sufficient to arouse the horror of the reasoning spectator and cause the stoutest heart to quail. But she was used to such feats. The coastguards went down there after a storm to recover *débris*, and Mamie was in the habit of following the same track in pursuit of gull and cormorant nests. Not that she ever touched the eggs, and would have scouted the barbarous suggestion with horror, but she liked to see the fluffy youngsters just out of their shells, and all the mess of weed and pool and rock in these practically unexplored coves. She had been known to bring a fine lobster or crab back from such excursions to be boiled for tea, but this afternoon she returned empty-handed, having a particular appointment in view. She strolled leisurely towards the Rocking Stone. Her eyes seemed to look anywhere but ahead; they

roamed right and left, to sky and sea, and the short turf at her feet. Nevertheless, she caught sight of a man's figure standing at eager attention, long before she pretended to do so, and she did not vouchsafe any recognition of his presence till quite close at hand.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr Wetherby!"

"How sweet of you to come!" he cried. "I—I was afraid you might have had something else to do, or that you would think my note was beastly cheek——"

"I should have answered it in that case," she replied, "and not left you waiting here all the afternoon. What do you want?"

She was a most discouraging young person. There was something about her downrightness, her absence of artifice, which positively paralysed Wetherby, although he ought to have been used to her by this time.

"I—I," he stammered, "have heard from my uncle. The one in Australia, you know, that I told you about, and I thought you might like to hear what he said."

"Yes, go on," said Mamie, quite eagerly.

"He'll give me something to do if I go out. I can help to look after the sheep. He says if I am not quite a fool, and not afraid of work, I might do worse. Here is his letter."

He put it into her hand, and Mamie sat down on the grass and read it, with the solemnity befitting so serious an occasion. Her comments were marked by the shrewdness which often surprised people who did not understand the wayward young tomboy.

"He isn't as sweet as honey," she said, "but I should say he wasn't a bad sort in a way. Is he married?"

"I never heard he was."

"Then he hasn't got anybody belonging to him, and he might take a fancy to you, if you showed him you were made of the right stuff. I should go."

"It's a long way off," he said dolefully.

"What of that?" asked Mamie, with a frown. "Have you changed your mind already? Are you still clinging to Carnruan?"

"N-no. But one can leave Carnruan without going to Australia. There is something in between."

"Is it the school you can't bear to part with, or your sailing boat, or the Craddoc volunteers?"

"None of them," he responded energetically. "You, Mamie!"

"I!" Mamie stared at him, feigning surprise; but his eyes were too much for her. The peachy pink of her cheeks deepened despite herself, and she turned her face away and plucked a blade of grass. "How can you be so absurd!" she said a little tremulously.

"Is it absurd to love the most delightful little girl in Cornwall? O Mamie, Mamie, if I went to Australia I might not see you again for years!"

"Then stick in the mud here for ever," she said almost viciously, "and become a potato at once!"

"I'll go gladly," he said, "I'll set off for the end of the world with a light heart, if you'll only assure me you are interested in my success!"

"I suppose you reckoned I was interested to some extent when you asked me here to discuss your letter?" she said.

"Yes; interested," he repeated eagerly, "but how much? Is it as a friend—only as a friend you like me, Mamie, darling?"

"I wish you would not call me darling," snapped the girl. "It's silly. I don't remember saying I liked you at all!"

He was aghast at such cruelty, and now he came to search his memory, he could not recall that she had.

"I—I must have deduced it from things that have occurred," he said in some perplexity. "I'm sure I don't know what things, if you ask me. You've never been particularly kind to me—at least not for more than half-an-hour at a time! You don't *dislike* me, do you?"

"No," said Mamie; "not when you're sensible," and she began to bite the blade of grass.

"I say, Mamie, listen to me. I'm desperately in earnest."

"I am glad to hear you can be in earnest," she said. "You've played away your life long enough."

"I shall do double as well in Australia," he said, "if—if I know I am working for you as well as for myself. Oh, Mamie, will you marry me?"

"No, thank you," said the girl.

Adolphus turned very pale. He swallowed convulsively. There was nothing to be heard but the gulls and the sea.

A gentle breath of air stirred a tantalising curl on Mamie's milk-white forehead. She was so pretty, so pretty, so tantalisingly sweet.

"You've broken my heart," he said in a low tone. "You can laugh if you like. I have laughed too long. I suppose you are too young to realise what harm you have done!"

He made a movement to rise from his recumbent position on the grass at her feet; but the girl stopped him, flashing round with an unexpected vehemence which was almost passion.

"I'm not too young to understand you very well!" she cried. "You want everything without working for it. You would like to lie on your back in your orchard, like a lazy schoolboy, and wait for the ripe plums to drop into your open mouth, and if they wouldn't drop you'd go to sleep and do without them. What's worth having is worth striving for, and a better appetite comes with hunger. A sensible man, a *real* man, doesn't ask for his wages before he's earned them."

Wetherby did not answer at once. He sat up, gazing at the girl with a curious expression.

"So I'm a lazy schoolboy, not a real sensible man," he said at length, "and I want my wages before they are earned! Thank you, Mamie."

"Don't mention it!" said Mamie, already somewhat ashamed of her outburst, and bending fiercely tearful eyes and flushed cheeks over a pair of thin brown hands which trembled as they knotted daisy stalks.

"I believe you like me after all," he added softly, "and better than a mere friend. I'll put my former question in another way: If I earn my wages, will you pay them?"

"*When* they are earned, I'll see," she said.

"You won't give me your promise to take to Australia with me?"

She shook her head obstinately. His hand stole up and stopped the knotting of the daisy stalks.

"Mamie, do you love me?"

"I sha'n't say! You *are* cool!"

"On the contrary," he said humorously, "my cheeks are almost as hot as yours. Do look up and see!"

"I suppose you are trying to be funny," she said. "It is a failing of yours."

"I have so many great failings," he replied, "that I wonder you trouble to mention such a little one. . . . Mamie, darling, darling, don't you love me?"

"I shall have to go away," said the girl bitterly, "if you don't!"

He was on his feet in an instant, punctilious and cross.

"Oh, pray don't let me inconvenience you! I shall place my little property in an agent's hands, and leave next week. If I can possibly find time to call and say good-bye to your mother and sister I will do so. I don't flatter myself that *you* will care an atom if you never see me again."

"It is always good to be modest," said Mamie, who was bound to have the last word at any cost, "and prompt and business-like in your affairs. Good-bye."

Wetherby stalked off, too indignant to trust his voice with a syllable of reply. But before he had gone more than fifty paces he glanced back, and it seemed to him that Mamie was sitting suspiciously still. He stole back very softly, screened by the Rocking Stone. She was crying!

The young man's face became suffused with a glow of almost holy tenderness. He went down on his knees, and crawled up to her, unheard through her stormy sobs, and kissed her on the cheek.

"Then you *do* love me!" he said. "Oh, God, I'm so glad!"

Mamie only wept.

"I'm not going to ask you again to bind yourself," he said. "You're perfectly right. You've got more sense and right feeling in you than a dozen asses like me! I sha'n't speak again until I've done something worth doing, till I've got something of a record to show you. And then—and then— Oh, confound it, here's some fool coming!"

The epithet was undeserved, although it was very annoying of John Tregenna to appear upon the scene at such an interesting

moment. Fortunately, he had not observed them yet, being far too absorbed in his own concerns, and Wetherby had time to spring to his feet, and Mamie to dry her eyes and pluck more daisies for her chain, before the massive figure striding so masterfully along the path perceived them.

Tregenna took off his hat to the girl, with a flourish, and stopped.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Mamie. I'm glad to see you."

"What the deuce is he doing here?" muttered Wetherby to himself. "Let him go and mind his own business."

Again he misjudged Tregenna, who was always minding his own business.

Mamie rose ungraciously as the rich man of St Ruth offered her his hand. She did not like Tregenna, and never troubled to be civil to people she disliked.

"I've been to see your sister," he said. "We've just settled something between us which has put me in a good temper with all the world! Maybe you can guess what that is?"

"I can't," said Mamie stolidly, but her heart began to beat fast, and she cast a glance at Wetherby which was almost one of fear and appeal.

"I should have thought a young lady would have been the first to guess it!" said Tregenna with a jocularly which rang untrue. "I hope you'll congratulate me, Miss Mamie? I am going to be your brother-in-law."

CHAPTER XXIX

IN SEARCH OF ELDORADO

No air refreshed Garth when he was jaded with overwork like Cornish air—nor he fancied so, being a Cornishman by adoption if not by birth—and as he wished particularly to be at his best while he prepared the address he was to deliver to the British Medical Association, he made up his mind to run down to Cornwall from Friday till Monday. Those week-ends out of London were the only thing which saved him from a breakdown,

and however busy he might be he always made time, once a month at least, for a trip to the country. Lately Colonel Carew had been unwell, which was additional reason for his choosing Cornwall for his brief holiday. Marion did not accompany him this time. Two long railway journeys in a few days were too much for Bobbit, and she would not leave the child.

Garth stayed with his mother and sisters, although he went to Poldinnick on the evening of his arrival, and prescribed for the Colonel. He was never quite at home at Poldinnick now. Inanimate things had an unpleasant trick of speaking to him of Vivian, whom he had ousted from his home, and the old soldier's figure had a pathos of its own. He at anyrate had done his life's work according to his lights, although it had been but in slaughtering men, and he had been rewarded by disappointment and dishonour, which he did not deserve.

With his mother and Mamie, Garth was as affectionate and familiar as ever; but it seemed to him he was not-quite as much to Rachel as he used to be. An impalpable barrier had risen between them. He used to understand her best of all; they used to be entirely in sympathy with each other. Now she no longer sought opportunities of confidential chat with him; on the contrary, it struck him that she was anxious to a *le-à-tête*, and once he noticed she made some excuse to leave the room when they were alone together. Naturally he attributed this change in her to her engagement to Tregenna, the news of which had caused him a painful shock. That a girl like Rachel could be in love with such a man he could not believe, and he was equally loath to believe she was willing to sell herself for money. The conduct of his favourite sister perplexed him, and although he did his best to hide it, no doubt the constraint of his manner equalled hers. Both of them had secrets, and that fact alone was sufficient to divide them. Garth had lost, too, much of his former simplicity. He was no longer interested in the petty details of village life and of his old home. His mother's tales about her chickens, her cat, the old woman who liked tobacco better than tea, which used to amuse him by reviving boyish memories, were now only wearisome. Although he listened

patiently, his life, for good and evil, was cast in a giant's mould, and everything which did not involve great issues was too trivial to hold his attention long. Even Rachel's engagement did not affect him as much as it would have done a couple of years ago. She was old enough to choose her own path, manage her own affairs. He, whose life was so complicated, was aware how difficult it was to assign motives to other people, and attempt to guide them. Rachel was his sister, but, close as they had been to each other, the age of youth and candour was past, and he could no more read her soul, over which the years had drawn their veil, than she could read his.

He let her go. One more link which had bound him to the past and to innocence had snapped. He consoled himself with Mamie, who still appeared open, still a child. She had her secret too, as a matter of fact—Adolphus Wetherby; but it made her lively, although he was going away. She had confidence in herself and a bright nature not easily overcast. Wetherby loved her, and he would not forget.

She rubbed her cheek kitten-like against her brother's.

"You dear thing," she said, "how scrubby you are! I am sure you haven't shaved for a week!"

"This morning, Mamie, on my honour."

"Yes; there is a cut under your chin," she said, investigating. "Fie, a doctor with an unsteady hand! But your head is steady enough, isn't it, Stephen?"

"I hope so, Mamie."

"You say that as solemnly as St John hopes that naughty little boys and girls will go to heaven when they die! But I like a blue chin. Does Marion? Mr Wetherby suffers anguish because his beard won't grow, and his absurd moustache is like silk. Yellow—chicken yellow, you know."

"Mamie, what are you talking about?"

"I don't know," said the girl whimsically. "It's so jolly to have you home again, although you're not quite such good fun as you used to be, Stephen."

"I regret to hear I am deteriorating," he said, with a faint smile. "I need you to liven me up, Mamie."

"The fact of it is you are such a big man now, you are

losing your sense of humour," said Mamie. "I've noticed it before. Young men are as vice as anything till they begin to get money and position, and then they are spoilt. I'm not sure, after all," she added pensively, "that I'm not making a mistake——"

"About what, Mamie?"

The girl blinked herself out of her day-dream.

"I don't remember what I was saying—nonsense, I expect. Never mind. Did we tell you Mr Wetherby was going to Australia?"

"I believe Rachel mentioned it. You will miss him. He is an old friend, and friends are scarce at Carnruan."

"Yes," said Mamie, sighing. "It'll be horrid to see a strange face at the schoolhouse. But one mustn't be selfish, I suppose. It's horrid to see a man wasting his life."

"Yes; Wetherby is too good to settle down to the drudgery of teaching. It is not as though he were especially fitted for it. His case has always struck me as being that of a square peg in a round hole. He ought to have gone into the army."

"He couldn't afford it, and now he is too old," said Mamie sadly. "He would have looked so nice in a uniform—a real regular uniform, although red hair and a scarlet coat would perhaps have been rather a trying combination to anyone who took an interest in him."

"Wetherby is a good-looking fellow," said Garth lightly "and the way you tease him is a shame, Mamie. I hope the Australian uncle will prove a decent fellow, and Adolphus will get on. Is he going to write to anyone?"

"He said something about it," replied Mamie with great nonchalance. "Oh, I daresay we shall hear from him. He is too vain to imagine anyone could forget him, or that a letter in his frightful handwriting would not be a treat! However, he is very well, in his way, and will improve with a little sharpening up. I have great hopes of him—although I nearly gave him up as a bad job at one time; he seemed so lazy."

"Did you tell him so, for the good of his soul?"

"I did," said Mamie calmly. "What is the use of being friends with people if you don't give them good advice? I wish

some others I know would be as amenable to reason as he is," she added, lowering her voice. "What do you think of Rachel and Tregenna?"

Rachel was at the other end of the room, and Garth glanced at her apprehensively.

"It's all right," whispered Mamie. "She's not listening. She's never listening now—not even when you're talking to her."

"I suppose she is in love," murmured Garth, with a troubled look at the young girl.

"In love," responded Mamie, "with that pig?"

"My dear child!"

Perhaps Rachel *had* heard after all, for she cast a glance at them between bent brows, and went out of the room. Mamie sighed; then she sniffed.

"I don't care," she said; "he *is* a pig. How Rachel *can*, I don't know!"

The girl was perched on the arm of Garth's chair. He played with her hair.

"It is very difficult," he said, "to judge others fairly. Tregenna may have all sorts of good qualities which only Rachel is able to perceive. He seems to be very fond of her."

"Oh, he's *fond* of her," admitted Mamie grudgingly. "One can't keep him out of the house."

"Naturally, as they're engaged, he wishes to see her often," said Garth, with forced tolerance. "I hope he will come while I am here, or I shall feel obliged to call upon him, and I do not wish to do so. Where will they live—at St Ruth? It is not a delightful spot."

"He is going to buy a big place; didn't Rachel tell you?" asked Mamie. "He's got heaps of money. I suppose that's something, although I can't see much good in it myself with a John Tregenna thrown in. Oh, I'm talking too much!" She jumped up. "And you want to go out and do a great big think. Bless you!"

She rose on tiptoe, and kissed his forehead.

"Don't forget about tea, darling. I'm always so hungry, and mother *will* wait for you."

Garth took the girl's face in his hands with a burst of affection, and kissed her warmly.

"You are as fresh as new-mown hay, Mamie," he said, "and it's a tonic to hear you rattle on. What a nice little girl you are!"

She was preparing a saucy retort, but her throat quivered instead, and she blinked away a mist from her eyes. His voice had moved her bright, sympathetic nature. Something had suggested to her that Stephen was not quite as happy as she had thought him.

But the impression was evanescent. He was so successful; he seemed to have everything he wanted in the world, and he nodded and smiled to her as he left the room. She had been getting silly thoughts into her head since Adolphus Wetherby spoke. Perhaps it was as well he was going away soon. Tregenna's folly over Rachel was ridiculous enough to witness; to have Wetherby hanging about the house in the same way would be too much!

Garth went out of doors, and strolled towards the sea. It was a peaceful afternoon; sunshine tempered by a faint haze had succeeded the wet mist of yesterday, and turf and grass and leaf looked greener for the soaking they had had. Fresh daisies had sprouted on the short grass, the fern fronds had uncurled in the shady hollows of the cliffs, and the red earth, where it peeped through the coverlet of turf, was as red as only Carnruan soil can be.

There was no quiet like that of Carnruan. Once out of the village itself, Garth walked on without encountering a soul. The cows and sheep browsing undisturbed on the cliffs were the only live things he met; the songs of the birds had the solitude all to themselves.

There was nothing as restful to him as this absolute silence. He did not want distraction in his holidays, only peace. To be able to relax, to let his brain lie idle, was his nearest approach to happiness at this time. The very ocean, soft and shimmering and motionless, was restful, and when the sun dipped and touched the opal of the sea with fire, Garth stood still and gazed at it. He remembered if he were to take a boat and sail straight

along the shining track, the first land he would touch would be the banks of the Orinoco—the land Raleigh explored in that wild, futile search for the golden mountains of Eldorado which cost him his health, his name, his life. God knows why the old story came back to him at this moment—the story of a great man's decline and downfall, the story of a desperate enterprise, a broken heart. But it fired his imagination for some reason. He seemed to feel what the man must have felt, who had only been released from prison on condition that he materialised a dream. Was he dreaming too—of another success, another reputation? Was the bargain he had struck with humanity as wild? He also was seeking Eldorado. For him also failure must mean ruin and a broken heart. The old-time adventurer had bought his liberty of James Stuart with promises of a vast fortune; the modern materialist had offered the fruit of his genius to the King of Kings. Raleigh had been unable to keep his word; would he?

The road to Eldorado!

In the Cove beneath were a couple of boats belonging to Colonel Carew. He was always at liberty to use them. The whim seized him to borrow one and sail out to sea on Raleigh's track.

His face was a little flushed as he descended the steep path to the sea; the fire of the sunset had entered his blood. For once, as though to indulge himself in a rare treat, he gave his usually restrained imagination free play. He would not have owned it to anyone, probably he would not own it to himself to-morrow, but he was regarding the similitude he had discovered between his own life and the explorer's as more than chance. He smiled as he helped to launch the boat, but his heart was beating faster than usual, and it was with an odd feeling of superstition that the modern man of science, the materialist, pushed off in the wake of the dreamer who had dreamed away his life.

He was treading in the footsteps of a ghost!

He lay back in the stern, with the tiller rope in his hand, and his cap over his eyes.

There was insufficient wind to fill the tiny sail, and the boat crawled. When the motion, almost imperceptible, ceased en-

tirely, that odd smile with which he had set out on his voyage crossed Garth's lips again.

It was not so easy to follow the golden track ! He wondered how many times Raleigh's heart had failed him on the way he had chosen—the way of life or death. He could picture the man on his final outward voyage, standing with folded arms on the the last deck he would ever command, his eyes fixed upon the setting sun. What emotions must have beset him, what thrills of hope and fear, what sickening doubts of his own wisdom in the end—doubts which he dare not admit to himself, much less confess aloud ! He had done his best, but man's best is not always enough. . . .

The sail fluttered like a rag. Garth's hair stirred. A capful of wind had rounded the bluff, and the last films of mist were clearing away.

He swung the main-boom round. The sail filled this time and bellied ; he began to move—but no longer in the face of the setting sun. He headed back again ; the sunset only gilded his right cheek now instead of his left. It was impossible to move without tacking, and when he tacked it was away from the light.

Garth became almost feverishly intent upon the business of sailing the boat. It was absurd that a mere inanimate combination of canvas and wind should defy him ! The boat *should* go his way ! Once more he set her bow towards the sunset, and was once more becalmed. He tried half-a-dozen times, wheedling the thing which had become the emblem of his life, using all sorts of expert tricks to keep in the chosen path. But he could not perform the impossible, and when the crimson and gold were fading to the rose and amethyst of twilight, he gave up the hopeless task, and lay back chagrined and motionless like a beaten man.

There was a foretaste of failure in his mouth. He anticipated the fall of night, grey, shadowy, the old age which would rob him of his energy and leave him only the dust and ashes of regret. He was alone—alone, discouraged and tired. It was a black moment. If he failed to reach the goal he aimed at, what would be left to him ?

CHAPTER XXX

GARTH TELLS A STORY

"HERE comes our friend Garth," said the Bishop, who was standing at the window. "Dear me, how time passes! It must be five or six months since he spent that week with us."

A moment later Garth entered, and was eagerly welcomed by the party, which consisted of Mrs Fairfax, Constance, and St John, as well as the Bishop. Once more he was staying at Poldinnick, with Marion and the child this time, and as he had only run over to Porthminster for a couple of hours he had not warned them by what train to expect him, and nobody had met him at the station.

"I hope everyone is well?" he said, smiling at the warmth of his reception. "Bishop, you grow younger than ever! Mrs Fairfax, nobody could believe it possible that you had a grown-up daughter if Constance were not here to proclaim it. Well, St John?"

He had shaken hands with them all in turn, with that air of sincerity which makes a serious man so charming in his lighter moods.

"Thank God, we are all in good health," said the Bishop. "And how are your wife and Bobbit?"

"Both very fit. She will come over with him one afternoon before leaving Carnruan; but as my time here is shorter than hers as usual, I thought I had better pay my visit alone. By the way, the Colonel hopes you will all do him the honour of spending a day at Poldinnick before Marion goes; he is writing, I believe. I hope my little brother is behaving himself, Bishop?"

"Oh, fairly well," said the Bishop humorously. "At least I have had no complaint of him from Constance! He has news for you, by the way, which I will permit him the pleasure of telling you himself."

"More news!" cried Garth. "I remember I was received with a surprise, a very pleasant one"—he bowed to Constance—"last time I came to Porthminster. What now, St John?"

"The most agreeable thing possible," said St John enthusiastically. "Old Mr Broughton has been offered a better living in the Midlands, and I am to take his place at Carnruan! Think of it, Stephen! Carnruan, dear old Carnruan! Constance and I will be settled at the Vicarage, near the mater and the girls, Poldinnick, and all the old friends and neighbours! Could anything have happened more opportunely, be more delightful! I always thought the Vicarage was the prettiest house in the village. Who could have imagined I should ever live there!"

"This is indeed a very pleasant stroke of fortune—which you owe to our good friend the Bishop, I am sure."

"It is none of my doing," said the Bishop, "that Mr Broughton has been preferred. For the rest, the living is by no means a rich one; but it is pleasant, as you say, that he should be settled near your mother, among people he understands. The Cornish folk are not easily got at by the 'foreigner,' whom they are apt to regard with suspicion and treat with reserve. He will do better there, I hope, than a stranger unaware of their peculiar temperament, and my selection would have fallen on him naturally if Constance were not at all concerned."

"I am far from accusing you of favouring your own people, sir," said Garth. "Your unworldliness is of a sort I disbelieved in till I met you, and I am sure if St John is a failure you will be the first to haul him over the coals!"

"They will have to be very economical," said the Bishop placidly, "but I think it is good for young people to begin in a small way. It teaches them unselfishness and self-denial. We were very poor, my dear, once upon a time, were we not?"

"Indeed, yes," said Mrs Fairfax, with her sweet, soft smile. "I remember darning your socks, Herbert, until there was nothing left to darn. Dear me, that was long ago."

"And when are you going to get married?" asked Garth, turning with a smile to his brother.

St John flushed and looked at Constance.

"We haven't discussed a date yet," he said, "but—but soon, I hope."

"Let me know in good time, that is all," said Garth, "in order that I may have my wedding present ready! By the way,

Bishop, didn't you have a lot of experience in your young days in our seaports? I seem to have heard something about it."

"You are right," said the Bishop, with the expression of a man whose mind has gone back many years to scenes which it does not ill please him to recall. "My first living was at Portsmouth, and—yes, I had experiences there which would fill a book. Rough enough some of them. I wonder how many times I have just escaped a broken head! I am a big fellow, and I was pretty tough as well in those days, but I can tell you if they had known how sick I felt sometimes they wouldn't have had so much respect for me. The stories I've listened to as well, and the confessions I have heard!"

"I suppose you have," said Garth, regarding him thoughtfully. "I suppose there isn't a crime with which you haven't been brought in contact in your time."

"It is true," said the Bishop; "but you must also come across some curious cases. I often think a doctor must hear even more than a clergyman. When people are frightened by illness and the approach of death their tongues are loosened, and there is always the idea that a doctor is as safe a repository for a secret as a lawyer."

"Yes; I do hear things sometimes," said Garth slowly. "A few years ago a man made a confession to me which interested me very much. He wanted advice, and I did not feel competent to give it, unfortunately. I wonder what you would have said, Bishop, if you had been in my place! I feel inclined to tell you the story."

"Do so, by all means," said the Bishop, with an expression of interest.

"Of course, I must not mention names," said Garth, "but that will not affect your judgment of the facts. This man—we will call him Brown—seems to have had a rather curious career. He was an artist of renown when I knew him, and a man of whom still greater things were expected; but his prosperity was founded upon a tragedy. Some years earlier, when he was quite young and poor, he had had the misfortune to make a foolish marriage. The woman drank; she was an insufferable incubus; he knew that anything like professional success was impossible with such a

degrading drag upon him, and he felt with a fair chance he had the talent to do well. When life had become unbearable he left her—she had means of her own—and took up his residence, under another name, in a quiet village where he could pursue his art untrammelled and in peace. There he lived happily until another woman crossed his path—a girl this time, young, innocent, who attracted him for her possession of all the qualities his wife had lacked."

Constance and St John, who had been talking aside, suddenly became attentive to Stephen's story.

"No one knew he was married, and he was beginning to confront the second problem of his life when, one day out walking, he came face to face with his wife. The meeting, it seems, was as great a surprise to her as to him; she had come to his harbour of refuge in quest of another man. But she was the worse for drink as usual, and in the violent scene which ensued she lost her footing on the hillside, and fell some feet, striking her head against a stone.

"A moment's investigation told the man she was dead; he knew as well that a little care on his part might have averted the catastrophe. But if his innocence were not perfectly clear, he had not raised his hand against her, and he was free. Instinctively it occurred to him to say nothing of what had happened, in case it should transpire that the woman was his wife—a fact he did not wish to reach the ears of the girl with whom he was in love. He went home and occupied himself as usual, with every hope that nothing would connect him with his wife's death. He was not rid of his curse yet, however. The police chose to imagine that the unknown woman discovered on the moor had met with foul play, and, to his horror, a friend of his was accused of the crime."

"This becomes dramatic," commented St John. "I am quite anxious for the end!"

"His first impulse was a natural one," pursued Garth. "He was determined that his friend must be cleared at any cost. But on second thoughts he hesitated to come forward. It seemed to him incredible, in this age of justice and enlightenment, that a man could be convicted of a crime he did not commit. He per-

sueded himself that his friend would suffer a few days—perhaps only a few hours—of anxiety, and then would be released without a stain upon his character; whereas if he were obliged to make a clean breast of his connection with this woman he would be incurring considerable risk. It would be wondered why he had not spoken before, if he were innocent, as he professed to be, of his wife's death. His desertion of the body on the moor, his silence, were bound to be misunderstood, and he might find himself in the dock, with far more likelihood of a conviction than his friend. Under such circumstances it seemed to him only common prudence to wait a while and watch the trend of events. . . . It is a long story!" added Garth, with a twitch of the lips which was meant for a smile. "Are you all getting tired?"

"Not at all," said the Bishop. "Like St John, I am quite anxious for the end."

"You are encouraging me to bore you," replied Garth, "but indeed I am curious for your verdict on a peculiar case which interested me strongly from my knowledge of the man. You will see that so far he was the sport of chance—that is not a proper thing to say to a Bishop, is it?—that, in fact, the trying position in which he found himself at this time was scarcely his own fault, barring the pardonable deception which had concealed his unhappy marriage. His silence respecting his wife's death, innocent at first, had merely become a sin through the appalling and unforeseen accident which fastened it upon another man's shoulders.

"The same evil destiny seems to have pursued him throughout. He was prostrated with brain fever—the result of worry, no doubt. When he recovered it was to learn that his friend had been convicted, and the death sentence had been commuted to penal servitude for life.

"Naturally he was overwhelmed with horror; but he found the girl he loved by his bedside, and a letter containing a most flatteringly worded offer from the French Government to buy his last picture for the Luxembourg. The one was a promise of happiness, the other of fame and fortune; and the conflict between all he desired, and justice, was complicated by a subtler question. His life was of value in the world: the finest judges of his art

had just pronounced him great, and something within him told him that he was capable of still higher things. His friend, on the contrary, was a mere sportsman, a ne'er-do-well, a man of pleasure, whose vacant place there were thousands to fill. To sacrifice his own knowledge, all his years of toil and striving, the cunning of his hand, the cultivation of his mind, in order to restore a mere trifler to freedom, appeared to him a sacrifice too wanton, too appalling, to be demanded of any man. If he had really committed the crime his conscience would have perceived no problem in the situation. But he was innocent, and he could not believe it was necessary to destroy himself in order to save his friend. Both of them, as he saw it, were equally the victims of circumstances, and that the other man had been the more unlucky of the two was no reason why he should offer to take his place.

"It was not easily or at once that he made up his mind; but every argument he advanced for and against himself came to the same conclusion. He was innocent, but if he spoke he would be hanged or imprisoned for life. The sacrifice demanded was too much: he could not make it. . . .

"Well, he married the girl, and became, as I told you, a well-known painter, with a title, and two sons at Oxford, and daughters married to well-born, wealthy men. But the secret preyed upon his mind, and once, when he thought himself dying, he told me all about it. He was no longer young, many years had elapsed, and his friend was out of prison. The man's people had cast him off, however, and his life was practically a wreck.

"This was the position when he confided the story to me. . . . Do you think I should have advised him to confess?"

Garth's question fell on a circle which had grown silent as the story proceeded, and fallen into attitudes of the deepest attention. The Bishop, whom he had addressed, was leaning on his elbow with his eyes downcast.

"The other man was free, you say," he remarked thoughtfully.

"Yes. He had es——" Garth checked himself, with a rush of colour to the face. "Yes," he repeated; "he was free."

"It is difficult," added the Bishop, "to give a decided opinion at once. So much depends upon circumstances. If the man

had been still in prison, my opinion would be ready enough, but—I must think a while.”

Garth turned to Mrs Fairfax; he was still a little flushed.

“What do *you* say, Mrs Fairfax?”

“I cannot help thinking of the feelings of the unhappy wife and children if he had confessed,” she answered softly. “Poor things—poor things!”

“And you, St John?” asked Garth.

“Constance and I think the same,” replied St John, who had just exchanged an eager whisper with his fiancée. “We cannot imagine how two opinions on such a subject can be possible.” His clear musical voice was vehement, almost passionate. “What can justify deceit, treachery, the purchase of one’s own safety at the cost of a friend? I say the man was a villain, a hypocrite, an egotist, except in his own estimation. His brains were a snare of the devil; his works will be framed in hell! If he had had a spark of manhood, of honesty, he would not even have stopped to ask himself a question on such a point. *Of course*, he ought to have confessed!”

Garth’s face was white enough now; his pupils had contracted to pin-points; his lips were curled in a dry, enigmatical smile.

“At twenty-five one is sure of everything in the world, St John,” he said. “At thirty one begins to doubt a few things. At sixty one hesitates before speaking—like the Bishop! So that is your opinion?”

“It is,” said St John, “and yours too, I hope! But what is your man really going to do? How will the story end?”

“He is dead,” said Garth abruptly. “He died without speaking; but he was never happy all his life.”

CHAPTER XXXI

RACHEL’S WEDDING DAY IS FIXED

POLDINNICK was still home to Marion—although a home in which she had suffered as much sorrow as happiness; but for her uncle’s sake she never refused his invitations to Carnruan if she could possibly avoid it. He had no one else. His old age was

so lonely, and she clung to him in the hope that she—she and her child—might recompense him a little for that secret injury which had spoilt his life. If he had been in the habit of dilating upon Vivian's fate in terms of grief these visits would have been unbearable. But the lips of the stiff-necked old man had shut like iron on his disgrace, and if he were unable to forget his son, he had contrived apparently to put him out of his heart, and suffer in his outraged pride alone.

The mere tentative mention of the outcast's name would make his lips contract to a thin, stubborn line, and his bushy brows descend threateningly, and his sharp: "A forbidden topic, Marion!" would send her back, sighing, to her needle.

She could not tell him the truth, and less he would not listen to. What use to speak at all?

This afternoon of her husband's visit to Porthminster, she was expecting Rachel and Mamie to tea, and she occupied herself, while she waited for them, with some pretty needlework for the child. No needle but hers was ever employed upon his little frocks and pinafores. She made them all herself, with the taste and deftness she brought to bear upon everything she touched, and a jealous affection which could scarcely endure to see him smile in another's arms. Already he was beginning to toddle about and talk in his broken baby way, and understand who loved him and who did not, and respond with all the pretty caressing ways of early childhood. In him at least she could find pleasure as yet without alloy. She could bury her face in his curls, and stroke his sturdy limbs, and find a woman's happiness in bestowing love without fearing disillusion and sorrow in return. His baby eyes were guileless; his tongue knew no artifice worse than to repeat the words she taught him; his budding mind was as a mirror into which, as she looked, there was nothing more to be seen than the reflection of her own soul. For the present at anyrate he was wholly hers. And beyond his childhood she would not look to seek for more anguish, having, God knows, enough to bear.

Mamie's voice, significant as ever of high spirits without a care, broke upon her reverie, and she rose smiling to greet the girls.

"Well, children, how late you are! I thought you weren't coming."

"Now Marion is putting on airs because she is a Wife and a Mother," said Mamie, in capitals and affected disgust, "and those misguided women in the village have been telling her that her particular brat is the most wonderful that has ever been seen!"

"You know you like him yourself, Mamie!" said Marion, laughing softly. "You said yesterday he wasn't so bad—and played with him for three quarters of an hour when the tide was right for fishing, and your mother was reckoning on you to catch the tea!"

"Of course he has improved," admitted Mamie, "although that isn't saying much! Anything more disgusting than the lump of pulpy red flesh you brought down to show us with such pride twelve months ago! I daresay in a year or two he'll be getting quite pretty."

"Oh, Mamie, he's a lovely boy! What a tease you are!"

"Lovely!" cried Mamie. "Lovely! Good gracious, the absurd vanity of mothers! That creature, with his little, fat, foolish face, and futile paws——! Where is it?"

"In the garden," said Marion, "with nurse."

Mamie darted to the door.

"Send for me when tea comes in," was her parting shot.

Rachel, able to get a word in at last, smiled at Marion.

"You must forgive her. You know what she is, and how deep her nonsense goes."

"She is sweet," said Marion. "I am sure plenty of men would think so if they could see her. I must get her to come and stay with me for a long visit this season. She runs wild down here, like the honeysuckle of the hedge which dies unplucked. It would be such a pity. Match-making is horrible, but if a girl never sees an eligible man she is missing one of her rights in life. . . . And you, Rachel?"

"I came to speak to you," said Rachel hurriedly, "to speak to you alone. Why haven't we heard from Vivian? It is nine months now since he talked of coming to Carnruan to see me, and in all this time not a word to any of us! What can it mean?"

I puzzle and puzzle my brains till they seem to be frying in my head! If he had been retaken we should know. Is he ill, is he dead? Sometimes I think the latter is the only interpretation. Oh, Marion!"

A dry sob broke from the girl's lips, and Marion put an arm round her waist as they sat on the couch side by side.

"There are many explanations besides that of death, Rachel. Perhaps he is proud, poor fellow, and will not write until he can tell us he is doing well."

"Oh, if that were only true!" sighed the girl, and she locked her hands in her lap, and her black eyes roved wildly round the room as though she were in a trap seeking some means of escape. "Marion, Marion, if I knew where he was, and that he wanted me, I believe I should throw up everything and run away and hide myself with him! No—no, I shouldn't! I don't mean half I say. It is as though someone else were talking. Of course, I am going to marry John Tregenna. Are we not engaged?"

"Engagements can be broken," said Marion tensely.

"Not mine—not mine, Marion."

"You must do as you like," said Marion in a low tone of anguish. "I dare not persuade you one way or the other, and you are old enough to decide. But if the sacrifice of ten years of my life would restore you to Vivian—even Vivian in exile—you might have them, dear."

"Yes, you are good," said Rachel, "good and noble, loyal through all. But you can't help me." She hugged her knees. "Nobody can help me except—John, and he won't. John!" She repeated the name in a whisper. "Good heavens, that I should ever come to call him John! We had one of our quarrels last night, and as usual he was victorious. We are to be married in two months."

"In two months!" repeated Marion, horrified. "Why, his wife has only been dead six!"

"It has been difficult, I can tell you, to keep him quiet so long."

"He ought to wait a year at least, in common decency."

"He has no decency, common or otherwise," said Rachel. "Oh, you don't know what he is! I haven't told you half, because

it makes me sick to talk about it. He is a brute!" She hissed the words between her clenched teeth. "A brute! Sometimes I think——" She stopped, curbing a mixture of rage and dread. "I didn't come here to harrow your feelings, and make you more wretched than you are, Marion! After all, *you* are the outsider; it is *for you*—if for anyone—to complain. Stephen is my brother, and—and I kiss him still when we meet. I am trying to harden myself, and not care for anything or anyone in future; it's the best way. Of course, John is very rich. Heaps of girls who didn't know so much about him would consider him an excellent match. He is going to buy an estate; and I am to have several carriages, and as many servants as I please and he will make handsome settlements. All this is part of the bargain, and I shall take care he fulfils his share of it. Oh, I shall make the money fly! There will be nothing else to live for. The wedding day is fixed for the 25th of May."

"But you shall not marry him! My poor Rachel!"

"Everybody supposes I am marrying him for his money: amusing, isn't it? But the most amusing part is we were engaged secretly several months ago."

"What do you mean, Rachel—while his wife was alive?"

"Yes. He made me promise to marry him if she died within a year. And she died within eight months, although there was nothing particular the matter with her then. He has been lucky, hasn't he? They called her disease enteritis."

"So your mother wrote me."

"The symptoms are very much the same as arsenic poisoning, you know, and they find arsenic in tin mines," resumed Rachel, in a matter-of-fact tone. "John—dear John handles it as other people handle flour. I have seen a packet of it lying about the dining-room."

"Rachel," cried Marion, pale to the lips, "what are you thinking about?"

"Dear John's luck," said Rachel. "What are *you* thinking about? Are you subject to evil dreams too?"

"And you are going to marry him!" cried Marion vehemently. "Oh, it is unnatural, horrible, impossible! I would rather Stephen——"

"An imagination is a mistake," interrupted Rachel. "The doctor had no imagination, and no doubts! My dear Marion, let us regard things as other people will see them—as they *are*. I am to marry a man who is coarse and vulgar, but immensely rich, and devoted to me. He was kind to Prudence during her illness, and has raised a most expensive stone over her grave. Our fancies run away with us. Is the reality so shocking after all?"

"You are trying to convince yourself, and you can't succeed," said Marion. "The mere idea of it will be sufficient to drive you out of your mind! But you shall not marry him!"

Rachel's self-control broke down suddenly. She buried her face in the sofa cushion, and burst into a storm of tears.

"I must!" she sobbed. "What is the use of talking? I must!"

CHAPTER XXXII

A WRECKED LIFE

A COUPLE of days later Marion and Garth returned to London, and Rachel with them. The girl was obstinate in her resolve. She hated Tregenna, but she was going to marry him. Obviously she was trying to harden herself, and make the most of the money, and adopted a worldly and flippant manner to hide a breaking heart. No more confidences occurred between her and Marion. Sometimes Marion could scarcely believe, indeed, that their conversation at Poidinnick had ever taken place. Rachel only alluded to it once. She said, apropos of nothing particular, that she was getting hysterical, and often excited herself over fancies she would laugh at when her nerves were in good condition. She wrote to Tregenna, and set about getting her trousseau, which was the object of her visit to London.

Her mother had been able to give her no more than fifty pounds for this purpose, but Stephen Garth had always promised the girls a hundred pounds each when they married, and now told his sister that she need not stint herself, and could send her

bills to him. What irony of fate that it should be Stephen who was paying for the clothes to deck her sacrifice! If he had only known!

She went about her business with compressed lips, stony eyes, weariness, and disgust. As yet, at anyrate, she had not found the solace she pretended to anticipate in the spending of money. She was even tempted in a malicious mood to buy the most hideous things she could find, in order to make herself as big a fright as possible, and was only preserved from such folly by realising the childishness of it.

It was dreary shopping, as painful for Marion as for Rachel. The consciousness of the circumstances under which her finery was to be worn took away all the girl's pleasure in new clothes. Mrs John Tregenna would wear them, the second Mrs Tregenna! It seemed scarcely credible to Rachel still.

Constance Fairfax was busy preparing for a wedding too, and came up with her mother to stay at the Langham Hotel. She was comfortably placed, and her unconscious air of self-satisfaction had never been more strongly marked than when she came to lunch at Harley Street on the occasion of a flying visit of St John's to London.

Although she was not marrying a rich man, they would begin very well in a quiet way. She had five thousand pounds of her own from a great-aunt, who had also left her a house full of beautiful old furniture, with the proper complement of silver, china, and glass, which had been carefully stored by a devoted mother until the proper occasion for its use should arise; so the young people had nothing to buy for their future home except carpets, curtains, and a little upholstery. Had it been otherwise, St John had no capital to fall back upon; but nothing in the way of an obstacle seemed to arise in the course of their love story, which ran along with a smoothness cheerful in fact if dull in fiction.

Mrs Fairfax, having an engagement elsewhere, the fiancés came alone: St John flushed with pride and happiness, Constance pleased with herself, her future, her new spring costume of dove grey and white, and the modest engagement ring, with a very small diamond in it, which sparkled when she removed her glove.

Garth had been called out of town, but hoped to be back before his brother and Constance Fairfax left, and Marion informed them of the fact, and apologised for his unavoidable absence as Constance shook hands with her and kissed Rachel.

St John, who had greeted his sister affectionately, expressed surprise at seeing her.

"I did not know you were in London, Rachel."

"I have only come for a week or two," she said. "I think my errand is similar to yours, Constance."

The smile with which Constance had been responding to Marion's excuses faded. A slight constraint became visible in her manner.

"Similar to mine?" she repeated. "I am buying my trousseau."

"And I am buying mine," said Rachel. "We are to be married on the 25th of May."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Fairfax. "Mrs Tregenna has been dead—how many months?"

"Six," said Rachel bluntly. She was taking a dislike to her future sister-in-law.

Constance's expression grew still colder; she stiffened visibly, and glanced at St John, who returned her gaze uneasily. He knew what she meant, and approved of her sentiments with an undivided mind; but it was not easy to express them as she desired. Yet he was the man, the minister, and if he showed himself lacking in the moral courage and unequal to the task of admonishing his own sister for her good, how could he expect to win influence over his flock and retain the respect of his future wife?

His fair boyish face flushed. He was really indignant with Rachel, who seemed strangely lacking in the good taste and sense of propriety he could have wished his sister to show at all times, and more especially just now.

"My dear Rachel," he said, "I am surprised that you should contemplate marrying this man so soon after his wife's death! Is it quite nice? Is it proper? I always understood twelve months was the minimum of respect which decency paid to the dead!"

"Mr Tregenna desired the wedding to take place soon," said Rachel, "and I yielded to his desire. I am sorry my conduct displeases you, St John!"

"Displeasure is scarcely what I feel," replied St John, who was very displeased indeed. "It was with astonishment I received the news of your engagement to a man so much your inferior in manners, birth, and education. But this unseemly haste! I must say, Rachel, I am a little disgusted."

Rachel turned white, and her eyes flashed.

"How dare you speak to me like this!" she cried passionately. "You are a boy, a conceited boy; your new importance has turned your head. Do you think I am not more capable of conducting my own affairs than you, who know nothing about them?"

It was too much that she should be reproved, and before Constance Fairfax, when she was making such a sacrifice to preserve the family name. She perceived for the first time that her engagement to Tregenna had been the subject of some adverse discussion between St John and his fiancée, and they had concluded—probably Constance had concluded—that she was marrying for money. Her brother at least should have known her better.

The tears which were struggling with her anger gained the the upper hand then. She went out of the room, and banged the door.

Although Marion sent up an imploring message, and even came to the door herself, Rachel refused to budge from her room until St John and Constance had gone. She would not have any lunch; she was not hungry; she only wanted to cry, and hate the world. Everyone was against her. It had only needed this snub from St John to crown the bitterness of her sacrifice. Calling him a pompous, conceited boy to herself several times did not console her for their quarrel. She had a great affection for him, of a kind quite different from her affection for Stephen, who was so much older than herself. She admired the young priest's principles, although his occasional austerity—the over-earnestness of youth—made her smile; and she would have felt inclined to forgive his attack, when her temper began to cool, if she had not

felt sure of Constance Fairfax's influence in the background. The feminine point of view was so apparent in his tone. It was so essentially a woman's thought to credit another woman, whom she did not happen to understand, with making a mercenary marriage. Rachel could imagine how Miss Fairfax, the daughter of a bishop, who was engaged to a poor man for love, must be pluming herself upon her righteousness, and suggesting contrasts to St John's susceptible mind. It was impossible that his attitude was self-inspired.

Rachel writhed in impotent rage. She loathed Constance, whom she stigmatised as a pious prig; she registered a vow to withdraw her confidence entirely from St John henceforward, and see as little of him as possible after his marriage. She regretted now that they were coming to live at Carnruan. If Constance were going to take upon herself to be public censor of morals because she was a bishop's daughter and a vicar's wife, she would be a nuisance to the entire neighbourhood.

Meanwhile Marion had been exercising her gentle tact with St John below, suggesting he had been a little too harsh, a little too ready to judge his sister, who might be actuated by motives he knew nothing about. He doubted this—what motive could Rachel have other than that of impatience to shine as a rich man's wife?—and Constance smiled. Nevertheless, he listened with the deference he always showed to Marion, whom, after Constance, he respected more than any woman of his acquaintance; and being the best-hearted fellow in the world, speedily repented of his harshness, if he refused to admit it was not justified.

Lunch was only just begun when Rachel heard another tap at her door.

"It is I," said St John's voice. "Do come down."

"No," said Rachel obdurately.

"I say, open the door." His voice had taken on an appealing, boyish note. "Rachel!"

She could not quarrel with St John after all. She dried her eyes, and opened the door.

"I regret I was disagreeable, especially before others," he said. "Marion and Constance will be hurt if you do not come down to lunch. They sent me to fetch you."

Constance would be hurt! Rachel's hot, fretful temper would not have been over-grieved at "hurting" Constance. It would only be ridiculous to refuse a reconciliation, however, and she had a saving sense of humour. So she replied that she would be down in a moment, and after bathing her eyes rejoined the party. Constance was kind, wishing no doubt to remain on good terms with every member of St John's family, her rigid sense of propriety being involved, and subsequently took her departure with every expression of good will.

Rachel sniffed.

"I am trying not to take a dislike to Constance Fairfax," she told Marion, "but I shall! You will see she will turn St John round her finger after they are married."

"Is he so weak? You do not give your brother a happy character."

"He believes so enormously in her mind, and she can play upon him by reminding him of his duty—which begins at home, like charity, by guiding his relatives in the way they should go! He is a dear fellow, but he already takes himself too seriously, and with her encouragement will become tragic—or farcical."

"*Can* a man take himself too seriously?" asked Marion in a low tone. "*Can* a man be too alive to his responsibilities towards the world and his own soul? Thank God, St John has religion and conscience which he cannot disregard."

Rachel did not wish to prolong her visit to London unduly. Her mother was ailing, and wanted her at home. The approach of her marriage, too, made her cling almost passionately to the old life and the old associations which she would soon be leaving for ever. And in Harley Street the constant flow of visitors, which Marion could not check, grated upon her mood. She was in haste, therefore, to complete her purchases, and she and Marion drove to Bond Street immediately after Constance and St John had gone.

As they emerged from the dressmaker's a shabby man opened the door of the brougham which was waiting outside. He was threadbare and dusty, and almost without glancing at him Marion took some coppers from her purse.

At that moment the man looked up, and the eyes of the lady and the eyes of the street loafer met. An electric shock seemed to pass between them. For an instant both were struck motionless, dumb. Then a half-stifled cry broke from Marion; the man dropped the handle of the carriage door, and darted up a side street.

Rachel, who had already entered the brougham without observing the man behind the door, leaned forward in alarm.

"What is the matter, Marion? Are you ill?"

"I feel a little faint," replied Marion, and she took her seat in the brougham, and leaned back with blanched cheeks and closed eyes.

It was Vivian who had opened the carriage door.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GREAT DISCOVERY

GARTH returned home rather earlier than usual that afternoon, and went straight to his laboratory. An idea had struck him earlier in the day, as he was driving from Harley Street to Kensington—an idea which promised to supply the one missing link in his theory concerning the cure of consumption.

For lack of it his experiments had failed again and again until a man less tenacious of his own opinion would have forsaken it in despair. But he had persevered doggedly. He was *sure* he was right—in his main theory. It was only that there was still something wanting to convert failure into success. And at last he believed he had it. Like an inspiration it had come. His anxiety to put this new theory to the test was almost feverish.

Directly the door of his laboratory shut upon him he began his final experiment. It seemed to him that now or never was the moment of which he had dreamed. What if he should be really on the eve of the great discovery!

He had just absorbed himself in his task when there was a tap at the door and the nurse entered with Bobbit. Bobbit was always brought to his father before dinner to say good-night, and

however busy he might be, he was never too busy to cease work for a moment and kiss the child. But at this particular moment he could not pause.

"Wait a bit, Bobbit."

The boy, already firm on his feet, demanded to be put down, and the nurse stood him on the floor.

"You are not to worry dada, Bobbit. Dada's busy."

The child, too young to mind, toddled instantly across the floor towards the work bench.

Garth took no notice.

"Dada," murmured the child, clinging round his father with his small arms.

Garth disengaged himself hastily and a little impatiently.

"Go away, Bobbit," he said. "I'm busy. Nurse will have to take you away if you bother me."

The baby understood the repulse if not the cause of it, and sat down contentedly on the floor.

Garth took no more notice of the little int and speedily forgot all about him. The critical moment was a hand. He held his breath as he watched the result of the experiment.

A moment later he wiped his face and turned to the child.

"Now, Bobbit, I'm ready for you."

The baby, who had been running about the room, went towards him with his face screwed up for a howl.

"Hullo, hullo, what's the matter?" cried Garth gaily, catching him up. "You're not going to cry, surely! I can't believe a big man like you is going to cry!"

The child paused on the verge of a shriek, and the anguish of his purple countenance relaxed. He held up a fat fist tenderly, inviting his father to kiss it.

"A scratch, eh? But it's a very little one, Bobbit. Did you find a pin on the floor? There, it's quite gone now! Good-night, old chap!"

After Bobbit had gone Garth drank a little brandy, which was a very unusual thing for him to do: his hands were shaking, and he felt unsteady on his feet. Then he went to look for Marion.

"What is it?" she asked instantly, and her heart stood still.

"Success! Success! I have found the cure for tuberculosis!" He spoke to her because she was there. If there had been no one else to listen to him he would have talked aloud to himself, to a servant, the baby.

"Impossible!" she cried.

"It is a fact!" His voice was thick with exultation and emotion, his cheeks deeply flushed. He had forgotten their estrangement. The man was drunk with his own triumph—this marvellous triumph of the intellect he had elevated above his soul. "The world will stand still to hear me speak! A scourge will be exterminated, innumerable lives which are suffering, wasting, shall call me blessed; my name shall be handed down through successive generations throughout the earth as one of the greatest scientists who ever lived, the benefactor, *par excellence*, of the human race!"

She too was carried away. Her breath came and went quickly, her eyes dilated, she hung upon his utterance. It was indeed no light thing he had done. If the treatment he had discovered was as successful as he supposed, it would regenerate the human race, conquer the disease most insidious, widest spread, most devastating of all!

"The first thing to-morrow," he said, "I shall communicate my discovery to the College of Physicians. Within a few hours it will be telegraphed to every corner of the civilised world. Savants from all parts of Europe and America will be eagerly awaiting details. I shall not know how to answer the letters and telegrams of congratulation and inquiry which will pour in from all quarters; every scientist in London will leave his card at my door. And above all—above all," his voice broke—"the sick and suffering will thank me, the women whose children are tainted, the men whose wives are fading before their eyes, poor and rich, old and young, happy and sad! God, one sees a millennium possible! If so much can be done, why not all? Men's eyes will brighten with new hope; a thrill of regeneration will run through the jaded world!—Marion, from my brain, from my toil! Was I not justified after all?"

A bleak wind seemed to nip her. The colour left her face; her eyes, which had kindled in response to his passion, died like

a fire burnt out. He saw the change come, felt her throbbing sympathy expire.

"This afternoon in Bond Street," she said, "a man opened the carriage door for me, to earn a copper. He was in rags, and had been drinking. We recognised each other, and he fled with hanging head as a stray dog flies when a stone is thrown at him. It was Vivian."

There was silence for a moment after she had spoken. If she wished to damp Garth's exultation in his discovery she had only half succeeded. Her speech was a shock certainly, but the man's pride in the achievement of his intellect could not be destroyed by considerations of sentiment. He was more inclined than ever to stick to the attitude he had adopted, in defiance of the conventional morality, now that he had met with such success.

"You speak bitterly," he said at last, and his tone denoted a check if nothing more. "I can understand such a meeting must have been a shock to you. I also am shocked. What puts him into such a plight? Why has he not gone to the Colonies—why has he not asked you for the money you offered him?"

"I do not know," she said. "We had no conversation."

"Five hundred pounds should have lasted him longer than nine months in any case. What has he done with it? Why should he look like a beggar?"

"You ask me questions I cannot answer. You do not doubt my statement? It is no exaggeration."

"My dear Marion, of course I do not doubt your statement. It gives me food for painful reflection, that is all, by confirming the opinion I had already conceived of him. He did not go to see Rachel, in spite of his avowed intention; he did not go abroad; and he has got rid of five hundred pounds in a few months and reduced himself to absolute destitution! The deduction is obvious. He has gone to the bad."

"I am afraid you are right," said Marion. "What else could you expect?"

"Nothing else—with his disposition, it is true."

"His disposition would not have ruined him if he had had a fair chance," she retorted. "Under such circumstances every man would drown!"

"I deny that," said Garth. He was in the wrong humour for reproaches. Success had given him a rock to stand upon. His voice was metallic, inflexible, his manner hard. He dropped into an easy-chair, prepared to discuss the matter coolly, unflinchingly, unsentimentally. "A man of really strong character is equal to every situation. He is free, you convinced him that Rachel was ready to be won, you gave him five hundred pounds and promised him enough for a good start in the Colonies. His is neither a morbid nor even a thoughtful temperament, and it seems to me his prospects were fair nine months ago. If he has come to grief it is his own fault."

"You can say that to *me*!" she cried.

"Yes; and I maintain it."

"Sometimes," she said in a low emotional tone, "I am forced to the conviction that you have neither heart nor conscience—and I despair—I despair——!"

He was touched then, not for Vivian's sake, for hers, because he loved her. His voice and eyes softened.

"Believe me, I am not unfeeling," he said. "You should find it easy to understand that nothing would please me better than to know he was doing well. But the facility with which he has slid down hill in spite of the instincts of gentle birth and training, and the help we gave him, forces me to admit that the man is scarcely even second-rate. Only worthless material could have worn threadbare so soon."

Her colour had risen. She regarded him with a mingling of stupefaction and disgust.

"Your criticism amazes me," she said. "From you, least of all men, should it come! He is a victim, a martyr. If he has been weighed down by a burden too great for his strength to bear, can *you* sneer at him?"

"I was not sneering," he said quietly. "I understood you were asking my opinion of his state, and sentiment cannot blind me to his faults. He is weak; I always knew he was weak, poor stuff, and the knowledge influenced me—at the time. Good heavens, Marion, you cannot deny that my life is more valuable than his!"

"To whom—to God or to man!"

"I speak of the world we live in—of the only world I know, the only world which concerns me to-day. If I, equally innocent, had taken Vivian's place, *dare* you assert that it would not have been an infinite waste of brains, and that humanity would not have been immeasurably the poorer?"

"A man's talents do not justify his crimes. You know that as well as I do."

"I know that life cannot be lived according to the code expounded at a Sunday school," said Garth. "A man's reason was not given him in order that he should stifle it with a cut-and-dried, unpractical creed. I sacrificed one man to save millions living to-day, and millions yet unborn! Good God, if that is not ethical, what is!"

Marion rose and made a movement towards the door.

"When you take this standpoint," she said, "I am too grieved, too horrified, too disgusted, to listen to you any longer. Is it possible you have lost your old clearness of vision, or that you were never what you pretended to be? You sacrificed Vivian to save yourself with a cold-blooded brutality which would have seemed incredible to me once, and you will be willing, no doubt, to sacrifice Rachel also."

"Rachel!" he repeated, startled.

"Tiegenna knows. He saw what happened between you and your father by the Rocking Stone that night. Did you imagine that such a girl could care for a coarse brute like that?"

"Do you mean that Rachel knows too?"

"Yes. He threatened her, having made up his mind—like you—to get what he wanted at any price. She came to me with the story, incredulous, and I told her the truth. She is a good sister, you see, doing what she chooses to do silently for your sake, without any demand for compassion or gratitude. St John and Constance imagine she wants the man's money, and are quite disgusted. One could laugh—if one were not ready to cry."

He was stricken this time.

"Rachel," he murmured. "Rachel! Poor child!"

"It is horrible. She even suspects that his wife's death was not natural. She saw a packet of arsenic in the house, and

Prudence is supposed to have died of enteritis. Rachel says the symptoms are almost the same. Is that so?"

"Yes," he said. "But the man would not have dared——! What reason has she to suppose——?"

"No reason beyond the fact that he wished to marry again, and her horror of him, poor child. That she can suspect him shows what her feeling for him must be. If she marries him she will go out of her mind."

"Good heavens, I cannot permit it! What am I to do?"

"There is only one thing to do now and always," she said, and suddenly she clasped her hands, and extended them towards him in a superb gesture of appeal. "O Stephen, if you would only speak!"

Again he seemed to see her face as he had seen it on the morning when she told him that she knew; again he felt the emotion her voice and anguish had aroused in him. But although he loved her still, and as dearly as ever, he did not hesitate now as then. His crime was no longer new to him; he was accustomed to his silence, his success, the world's adulation, and, anticipating the greater renown his discovery would confer on him, he was less inclined than ever to grant what she asked of him.

"It is impossible, Marion; I have other work to do."

"On the day Rachel marries Tregenna," she said, "I shall leave you!"

Engrossed by their emotions neither of them had heard a knock at the door. It was repeated at this moment.

"Come in," called Marion, hastily composing her voice and raising her handkerchief to her face.

Garth turned away, and picked up his book. He was not callous because he had refused her request. A scene with her could never lose its poignancy. When she felt so deeply it was impossible to remain unmoved. Her threat, too, alarmed him. He could not bear to think of her leaving his house. If her companionship tortured him, it was companionship of a sort. He could look at her if he might not touch her; she talked to him sometimes; there was the expectation of finding her at his dinner-table to anticipate throughout the day, the painful assurance

of alluding to "my wife." What would the world say, too? His teeth met like a vice. There would be a scandal, endless whispers and conjectures to irritate him, excuses to be made, some explanation which would be more than half a lie. Whatever he said nobody would believe. Some people would blame him, some would blame her, and it would be as objectionable to him to have her conduct aspersed as his own. She knew all this, she who was so cool, so level-headed. Surely she could not mean it? She had spoken in anger, and he would hear no more of it. Besides, her threat was only contingent upon an impossibility. Rachel could not be allowed to marry Tregenna. Somehow he must put a stop to that lamentable affair. The girl should not sacrifice her life for him.

Through the buzzing of the many emotions which beset him he heard the nurse's voice speaking to Marion :

"Will you come and see Bobbit, ma'am? He's so fretful to-night. I can't get him to sleep."

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE HAND OF GOD

DURING the next few days both Marion and Garth were too occupied to see as much as usual of the child. The innumerable interviews and vast correspondence consequent upon his discovery, kept Garth busy, and his wife had many social duties to fulfil. In the moments she snatched from the world to spend in the nursery it struck her that the boy, usually noisy and good-tempered, was dull and quiet, but she attached no importance to a childish mood till the nurse commented upon it.

"His appetite's quite gone, ma'am. Do you think he can be sickening for anything?"

"I hope not," cried Marion, with a pang. "Perhaps he is cutting a tooth, and it is making him cross."

She was dressed for driving, and had gone to the nursery to say good-bye to Bobbit, who had just come in from the Park. His rosy colour had faded, certainly. His skin looked pale and transparent, and discoloured under the eyes.

A knife ran through Marion's heart. She glanced round the spacious, airy room, with its clean white paint, and flowers and pictures—the room which her love had made pretty and wholesome for the child. Everything had grown dark before her eyes. So far she had been spared the pangs of mothers who have sickly children. From his birth Bobbit had scarcely occasioned her a moment's uneasiness. For that reason she was readier to take alarm. Had she been too proud of him?

"Doesn't Bobbit feel well?" she asked. "Shall mamma buy him a nice new ball?"

The child bored his curly head into her shoulder and whimpered.

"What is it, darling?"

She laid her cool hand on his forehead, but did not fancy he was feverish.

"Yes, I daresay it is a new tooth, nurse," she said; "but anyhow his father shall see him when he returns. I don't think I shall go out."

"Oh, I'm sure it is not necessary for you to stay at home, ma'am," said the nurse soothingly. "I daresay he will be quite well again to-morrow. Some children, you know, are continually getting out of sorts."

"But Bobbit has always been so strong," said Marion.

She clasped him to her bosom with a movement which was jealous, almost fierce, as though a thought, which would intrude itself upon her usually well-balanced brain, had set her at bay before God and man.

She kissed the child's brow.

"Oh, I'm a foolish mamma, Bobbit! There are troubles enough in the world without looking for those which have not come. Eat your tea, darling, like a good boy, and mamma will say good-night to you when she comes home."

She went for her drive, paid a couple of calls, and bought some books Garth required, because she would not allow herself to yield to "nerves." But she was thinking of the child all the time, and semi-unconsciously her eyes followed every child of his age whom she saw in the streets, and wondered if he were the only one, and as dearly loved as hers. A beggar woman with a

baby in her arms won a shilling from "the lidy" passing from her carriage to a shop door, and a pale, puny child, richly clad, drew a glance of keener pity to the woman in silk and diamonds who held his hand.

Her boy was beautiful and healthy as well as rich. He was growing like a rosebud: but to the best cared-for garden may come a blight!

She sighed with relief when at last the horses' heads were turned towards home. She had worked herself into such a state that she would not have been surprised to find Bobbit down with scarlet fever. He had developed no alarming symptoms during her absence, however, and she left the nursery, whither she had hastened on entering the house, with a half smile at her own nervousness. She was a woman too healthy in body and mind to be morbid as a rule. It would never do to let herself go, and magnify every finger-ache on the part of the child. Of course, he would be fretful and uncomfortable while he was teething, poor baby! With Stephen in the house she had surely less cause than any woman to worry herself. If anything were wrong with Bobbit, who would observe it sooner than his father? And Garth was a good father. However busy he might be he never failed to see the child three times a day at least. To both of them this baby was the link between their ruined happiness and what might have been.

Marion said nothing of her own alarm to him until he commented upon the child's appearance himself.

"Hullo, Bobbit! He is not looking very bright, Marion."

"No," she said, with a quiver in her voice. "Nurse says he is eating nothing. Is it teeth, do you think?"

"Probably," said Garth, feeling the child's gums. "Yes; here comes another tooth. Poor little beggar! But you can't smoke a pipe without teeth, eh, Bobbit? It's very important to have teeth. I'll give him a bottle of physic."

But Bobbit still drooped. His appetite failed more and more; he moped; he began to lose flesh.

Marion watched the child with growing anxiety, and even Garth became uneasy. At the end of a week or two Bobbit was feverish.

It was evening, Garth was in his laboratory as usual, and Marion was taking a final peep at the night nursery. She found Bobbit with highly flushed cheeks and hot hands and feet. He was thirsty, but after she had given him drink he fell asleep almost at once. She went down to Garth. Directly she opened the door he knew there was something wrong with the child. She had not entered his laboratory of her own accord since the first weeks of their marriage.

"Will you come and see Bobbit? I believe he is sickening for something."

He seemed to have heard those words before as in a dream. He remembered afterwards:

"Will you come and see Bobbit, ma'am? He doesn't seem well."

He gave her a look, washed his hands in silence, and followed her upstairs.

The child still slept, but his cheeks were even redder than before, and his little hands, which he had thrust out of bed, were as hot as fire.

"What is it?" she asked tensely.

"I don't know. Perhaps the symptoms will develop to-morrow."

She locked her hands with a gesture of agony.

"Must I wait till to-morrow?"

"I may be able to tell sooner, Marion. Of course, I shall stay up with him."

"And I!" she said.

"It is unnecessary. After all, it may be nothing, and nurse will be here."

"I could not go to bed," she said. "I don't know why, but from the first day he seemed unwell I was anxious."

He put his arm round her, but she moved away mechanically. His eyes rested on her with hunger and pain. Even in this anxiety which they shared she could not forget, and left his side to suffer apart.

"Two of us need not remain with him," he said. "If you want me you will find me below."

He did not return to his laboratory. He went to the drawing-

room and picked up a newspaper. There were two columns and a leading article in it concerning the new cure for tuberculosis. He turned over a page. His own name confronted him again and again. He was the man of the day. His discovery was the topic of the day. It was suggested, he perceived, that a title should be conferred upon him, that he should receive a handsome present from the nation. The foreign telegrams detailed the sensation which the discovery had created in all the Continental capitals, and the comments foreign savants had made upon what all felt to be an epoch in the science of medicine. Already the novelty of this public recognition had worn off; the newspapers had been full of his name for several days; and he scanned the print absently, his thoughts upstairs with Marion and their child. If she had only remained to him what she had been once, what a life he would have had! His career would have been one round of happiness, success, triumph. He hoped Bobbit was not going to be ill. If he had not been too proud to return after Marion's snub, he would have gone upstairs again. When steps approached the door he looked anxiously towards it. But no one entered to tell him that the child was worse, no one came near him until, at one o'clock, Marion entered.

Perhaps she was sorry for the father if not for the husband, for the look on his face softened her voice.

"Bobbit is still sleeping," she said gently. "I think we had better go to bed. Nurse has promised to call us if necessary."

"Shall I look at him again?"

"Perhaps it is better not. You might wake him. Good-night."

In the morning Bobbit's feverishness had gone, but he awoke pale, with a dry skin, and a peculiar anxious expression on his baby face, which was slightly swollen.

It was evident the child was far from well, although Garth found it impossible yet to discover what was the matter. No further symptoms appeared, however, and he seemed to improve during the next few days.

Marion began to breathe freely again; not so Garth. The relapse he feared soon occurred. Bobbit drooped more and more, chills succeeded his feverish nights.

"It looks like ague," said Garth, "although it is impossible to be absolutely sure. I was afraid of typhoid, but there are no spots."

Marion would not leave the child. She cancelled all her engagements, and remained with him night and day. Garth had to continue his daily rounds, and it was needless, anyhow, for both of them to remain with the child. He was relieved, indeed, at the course Bobbit's sickness had taken. Ague was not as alarming as typhoid, and he was spared the anxiety in which the latter would have involved him on Marion's account.

She too was relieved, and watched Garth depart for a big city dinner with an easier mind than had been her lot for some time.

Bobbit was already asleep, and she sat down in the drawing-room with a little frock she was making for him. Nothing soothed her like the monotonous movement of sewing, which required sufficient attention to prevent deep thought, but not enough to tire her.

She followed Garth in thought to the Mansion House, where the dinner was taking place. He would be the guest of the evening, seated beside the Lord Mayor, and, of course, there would be speeches and toasts in his honour. He was a famous man, and she was his wife. Professionally he was more than fulfilling all the dreams of her girlhood; privately——

It was a strange life they led. She admired him and she despised him. She could never put him out of her mind as she might have done a man of weaker character. He was great, both for good and evil; she recognised that better with every day she spent beneath his roof.

The clock ticked quietly, and there was a scent of roses in the room which reminded her of Poldinnick in June. Garth had brought her home a big bunch of them that afternoon. There were white ones among the red like those she had worn that evening he asked her to marry him, and recalling the circumstance she felt again the prick of the thorn which had stabbed her breast, and heard his smiling, tender comment on her exclamation.

Surely the roses had warned her! But if she had known it in time, would she have dissevered her lot from his?

The question awoke a strange agitation in her mind. She could not help hoping against hope that he would confess still. And why should it ruin his career to do so? The world was not without generosity—towards its favourites at least—and if she believed the story of his meeting with his father, why should others discredit it? There would be grandeur in such a confession from such a man at the very height of his fame—a note of pathos, of human weakness in the one who had seemed strongest of all, which was as likely as not to make a hero of him. With that load off his mind and hers, Vivian restored to his own proper place, and pardon asked, why should they not be happy yet?

She could not see the impossibility of her dream. It seemed to her that his great reputation made atonement easier, not more difficult, biassed people in his favour, inclined them to be charitable, rather than the reverse. Knowing that he loved her still, she could not believe he would allow her to leave him, and she intended to keep her word if he permitted Rachel to marry Tregenna. Surely for her sake, if not for the girl's, he would shirk this second sacrifice of the innocent, and speak before it was too late?

Presently a servant entered with an evening paper which she had ordered. It was a copy of a "last edition," and turning at once to the "Stop Press" telegrams she read that at the dinner the Lord Mayor had announced that a gentleman, at present anonymous, had offered £300,000 for the erection of a hospital for consumption, on condition that another £300,000 was subscribed by the public, and that the hospital was organised and carried out under the sole control of Dr Garth.

It was a magnificent gift, and a magnificent compliment. Marion flushed with pride; her heart beat faster for him. The paper rustled in her hands, and she dropped them in her lap, glowing with pleasure. She was alone now. She need not fear to encourage false ideas of condonation in his mind. When he returned the only pleasure she would express would be on account of the charity bestowed on the public; now she might rejoice for the honour bestowed on her husband.

She was still dreaming when the nurse came to fetch her. Bobbit was awake. He seemed worse.

Marion hastened upstairs. The child was restless. He tossed himself about in his cot, and bored his head into the pillow, and cried at his mother's touch, as though her gentle hands hurt him. She was terrified. She wished with all her heart that Stephen would come home. The nurse was frightened too. She no longer thought, with Garth, that it was ague which ailed the child. She said she had never seen similar symptoms before.

Marion sat down by the cot, soothing Bobbit with her voice, and trying to lull him to sleep again. She counted the moments until Stephen could return. These city banquets were over at a reasonable hour; he would not be late. Only every five minutes which increased the child's discomfort was like an hour to her. She asked him again and again what was the matter, but he was too young to explain. She fancied his head ached, because he put his little hands to it frequently and uttered a curious high-pitched cry. It was like watching the agony of a dumb animal, only worse, because he was a child, her child.

When, at last, she heard the sound of wheels stopping outside, followed by Garth's footsteps on the stairs, she went to the door to meet him.

"Oh, I am so glad you have come!"

Her voice was a sob, and his brows contracted with a twitch and his look of anxiety deepened.

"Is he worse?" he asked quickly.

"I don't know what is the matter. I have been praying for you to return. He is twitching frightfully; it is almost like St Vitus's Dance, and I think his head hurts him, poor baby. He will scarcely let me touch him."

Garth paused and stared at her with an expression, blank, incredulous, which she could not understand.

"Twitching," he repeated quickly, "headache!"

At this moment Bobbit uttered the shrill cry which struck like a knife to Marion's heart, and this time it struck still deeper in the man's. He bleached, and, almost thrusting Marion aside, went to the child.

She turned and looked, that was all. The strength had gone out of her limbs. She, who knew him so well, could feel the hand of ice which had gripped him, see the tension, the locked

lips, the suspended breath, the dread she waited for him to name.

He gazed at her over Bobbit's head; his mouth opened and shut silently.

"Don't be afraid to tell me," she said; "I must know. What is it?"

"Consumption. It seems incredible!"

Husband and wife stood staring at each other. Although Marion had expected bad news, the shock was so great that it stunned her.

"Consumption!" she repeated. "Bobbit! But you said it was ague?"

"I was mistaken, unfortunately. Until this evening it was impossible for any physician, however skilful, to diagnose the case. In young children the disease takes a different form from that which it takes in adults."

He imparted his information in a dry, even voice, which was almost toneless.

The woman, who still stared, relaxed her rigid attitude, and drew a step nearer to him.

"But he has always been such a strong, healthy child!"

"I thought so. Is there any consumption in your family?"

"Not that I know of."

"Nor in mine," he said.

"Perhaps you are mistaken," she said, "as you were mistaken before. Is he not too young?"

"No age is too young. We call it tubercular meningitis."

She drew nearer. Her hands locked. The stupor was passing; she was beginning to break.

"Thank God that you can cure him, Stephen! You have discovered the proper treatment just in time."

"There is no cure for a child of his age," he replied, "because one cannot ascertain the nature of the disease until too late. This is the beginning of the second stage, the fatal stage."

"The fatal stage!" she echoed wildly. "Do you mean the child—*my* child—is going to die?"

"Yes," he said. "I dare not give you hope. He will not

live longer than a couple of weeks. We may lose him in—in few days!”

He stopped with a gasp, and threw his arm across his eyes. She dropped on her knees by the cot, and her shriek went through him.

“My child! O my child!”

She was half out of her mind. She clasped Bobbit in her arms, she hung over him, drawing her breath from her lips as though seeking to inhale the death which had stolen through her guard to rob her of her chief treasure.

“Marion—you are hurting yourself and him.”

She glared at him like a crouching tigress.

“I hate you! It is the curse which is falling—the curse of your crime!”

“You do not know what you are saying,” he said dully.

“The sins of the fathers!” she cried. “Yes, we are accursed! What is the use of your vaunted science if you cannot save the life of your own child? Do you call it mere chance that he should be stricken by the very disease you have made your life’s study? It is the hand of God! God’s answer to your immoral plea of justification!”

He gave her a glance of silent anguish, and sank down on a chair close to the cot. She was sobbing. Never in his life had he seen her in this mood. The marvellous courage and self-command with which she had faced a situation which would have driven some women mad, had deserted her at last. The child’s attack was the last thorn in her crown of martyrdom. She could bear no more, and the pent-up emotion of many months gushed from her now in words and tears.

“If Bobbit dies I shall die too,” she said; “what else have I to live for? Your touch is like a blight; it withers everything around you: Vivian’s life, his father’s, Rachel’s, mine, and now the child’s. Wherever you look is desolation! What you build up with one hand you cast down with the other. I tell you God will not allow even your good intentions to prosper, for there is evil at the root of them—pride, deceit, treachery, the defiance of His laws, before which the highest shall bite the dust!”

“You seem to forget the child is mine as well as yours,” he

said in a low tone. "I did not think you could have been so cruel to me."

She was stricken suddenly in the midst of her passion, and another gush of tears drowned her voice. Once more she kissed Bobbit, and rested her head on the pillow beside him. Her weeping grew quiet now, more heart-rending on that account, if such a thing could be, and her lips sought Bobbit's again and again, and her hand covered the hand, so soft, so tiny, which would never be a man's.

By-and-by her eyes returned to Garth. His back was bent as though the weight of the world's woe rested on it, his head bowed; he leaned forward in his chair with his arms resting on his knees, and his locked hands hanging down between. His attitude expressed what she had expressed differently.

Her eyes softened. A quiver ran across her face.

"Stephen," she said, "I am sorry I was so harsh—to-night."

CHAPTER XXXV

IN THE SHADOW OF DEATH

ALTHOUGH he knew it was useless Garth yielded to etiquette and his own anxiety, and called in a fellow-specialist to see Bobbit. Already there was a change in the atmosphere of the house. The shadow of death seemed to be hovering over it. Garth was obliged to attend to his work as usual, but otherwise the daily routine was disorganised, and the servants walked softly and spoke in whispers.

The colleague Garth had summoned was a clever man and a good friend, above jealousy. He came sorrowfully that afternoon, and met Garth with intense sympathy and an attempt at cheerfulness.

"That sturdy youngster failing!" he cried. "I can't believe it. You've got tuberculosis on the brain, Garth—the nightmare of overwork."

Garth only sighed.

"Come and look at him."

It was not necessary for him to ask for the verdict afterwards.

"Heaven help you," groaned Cameron. "This is the most terrible thing I ever heard of! How could he have contracted it? Is it in your family or the mother's?"

"Not as far as we know."

Cameron hesitated to put his next question, with a glance at Marion, who had just entered the room.

"Has he ever been in your laboratory, Garth?"

"Yes; many times. But——" Garth stopped suddenly. A dawning memory held him in its grip; he caught at his breath, and a look came into his eyes which the other man never forgot. "I was going to say," he added after a moment, "that I was sure he had not contracted the disease there. But—now I come to think of it—I am not sure. He is always brought to my laboratory to say good-night. One evening I remember seeing a scratch upon his hand—a fresh scratch which he asked me to kiss." He paused, moistening his lips. "I paid no attention at the time. I was busy, preoccupied. He had been crawling about the floor, and I thought he had found a pin. Afterwards—afterwards I was horrified to discover a broken test-tube on the floor. I could not imagine how it had happened. I had forgotten about the child."

A silence fell. It was Cameron who spoke first.

"I am afraid this is the explanation, Garth. He must have reached up, and caught hold of the tube, while you were not looking."

"The nurse was in the room too."

"But his hand *was* scratched, and the tube *was* broken," said Marion.

"You think I was careless?" he said. "God knows, you cannot reproach me half as much as I reproach myself!"

"I am not reproaching you," she answered drearily. "It was as much nurse's fault—and mine—for not remembering that it was dangerous to allow so young a child inside your laboratory. We were equally to blame."

Her generosity could not comfort him. This tracing of the child's contamination to a preventible source was the crowning agony. While he was working for the good of the human race he had slain his own child!

He looked at Marion, seeming to hear her voice again—the voice with which she had attacked him last night:

“What you build up with the one hand you cast down with the other. . . . It is the curse which is falling—the curse of your crime!”

He lingered with her wistfully after Cameron had gone.

“You are *sure* you do not reproach me, Marion?”

“Why should I do so?” she asked. “As you reminded me last night—he is yours as well as mine. Is it likely I should imagine you had neglected him purposely? We all make mistakes.”

He marvelled at her well-balanced mind and self-control. Surely she was different from any other woman in the world? It was his fault, or through him at anyrate, that they were to lose the child, but she could be just even at such a time of anguish—as lenient to his fault of unconsciousness as she was stern and unyielding to his crime.

She had a fancy to take Bobbit down to Cornwall. The air was so mild there, and the blue sky, green fields and flowers, were fairer surroundings for his last days than the grim city streets. Garth did not refuse her request, although it would necessitate his giving up everything in order to accompany her. Perhaps it was a relief to him too to escape the inquiries, the condolences, the patients he could not avoid while he remained in London. His practice might go to the dogs. Ambition, satiated for the moment, no longer urged him to Herculean labours. He had succeeded, and the sequel of his success was sorrow. He was tired, this man who had become famous. He went to Carnruan wearily to watch his child die.

CHAPTER XXXVI

CIRCLES EVER WIDENING

“How is Bobbit this morning?” asked Colonel Carew.

“He had a restless, feverish night,” replied Marion. “I did not attempt to sleep.”

“You will be ill yourself, my dear,” said her uncle kindly.

"If I were Garth I would insist upon your allowing the nurse to take more off your shoulders."

She made a gesture of dissent. Her face, indeed, bore traces enough of the fatigue and nervous strain under which she was suffering.

There were dark circles beneath her eyes, which were hollow with perpetual watching, the delicate bloom had faded from her cheeks, and her whole manner betokened the lassitude of despair.

Some women in her place would have been angry with God: she was not. It seemed to her just that the child should die. He who had sinned must be punished, and she, who was his wife, must suffer with him. It would have been too much happiness that the boy, so beautiful, so intelligent, should live to delight his parents' eyes. They were to be deprived of him as a reminder that there could be no gladness in sin, that true repentance was the only atonement.

Garth had also been up the greater part of the night. The baby might be seized with convulsions at any time, and he feared to leave Marion alone. She knew, too, why he was as loath as herself to be out of the nursery. By-and-by there would be only a memory to dwell upon—a portrait in place of the face of his only child.

After breakfast Marion lingered with her uncle.

"Sometimes," she said, "I feel it was selfish of me to bring our troubles home to you, who have enough of your own, God knows."

"I have no troubles," said the old man in a hard tone, "except yours, Marion. I had a disappointment once, but I have forgotten it. If it were so willed that your son should live to be a man, who knows that he might not bring you disillusion and disgrace like mine!"

"I would have taken the risk," said Marion between her teeth.

"I was just as proud of Vivian when he was a child," said the Colonel, "and just as sure he would turn out well."

"At least you had the pleasure of him through his childhood and school-days," she said.

"That only made what happened afterwards more bitter."

"I thought you had 'forgotten'?" she reminded him, with a half smile, tender and sad. "You malign yourself, uncle. You still care for Vivian. In your heart of hearts he is still your son."

"A murderer," he said thickly. "A convict! The very sound of his name is an offence to me!"

"But he is innocent. Yes—yes, I must say it again, uncle, however angry it makes you! If my boy were a man, do you think I would believe anything against him?"

"You are a woman, my dear, and a fool," said the old soldier. "But—enough of a forbidden topic."

Her heart yearned the more over the unhappy father that she too was to lose a son; but how could she convince him of Vivian's innocence without betraying Stephen's guilt?

She went out of doors for a few moments and Garth joined her.

"I would give a great deal," he said, "if I were not obliged to go up to London this evening."

"Then you *are* going?" she said.

"I must attend the laying of the foundation stone to-morrow. I would not leave Bobbit for anything. But they expect me. It would cause great disappointment if I upset the arrangements now. It is impossible, in fact, as the Prince and Princess are to be there. Of course, I shall return by the first train after the ceremony. Telegraph if—if there is any change."

"Very well," she said.

"Rest this morning, Marion," he said, regarding her with tender concern. "I am going to the child."

She obeyed, being really worn out, and Garth went upstairs to the room where the poor baby lay dying. He had been feverish all night, but he was drowsy now; his face was pale and clammy, and his breathing slow. He cried out plaintively at intervals, and each cry was as a stab to Garth. His own child, and he could do nothing but wait for the convulsions which had already occurred several times, and would be repeated till the end.

It gave him a sense of futility approaching despair, in spite of his great achievement, to watch the boy suffer, to know that all

his science could not save this one dear life. If Bobbit had been stricken by any other illness it would have pained him deeply enough, but that it should be this one never ceased to overwhelm him with the irony of fate. He could understand how it must affect a woman of Marion's temperament, and what light she was bound to regard it. A thrill of superstition had even occurred to him; but it had been over in a moment. The child had contracted the disease by a natural accident for which his own carelessness had been responsible. What was the use of looking farther?

In the course of the morning Mamie came in to tell them her mother had received a letter from Constance and St John who had been married in due course, and were now away on their honeymoon.

"They write to say they will be back to-morrow," she explained. "I am going to the Vicarage to see that everything is ready for them, and put some flowers about, and order dinner."

"I understood they intended to remain away longer," said Garth. "Is it possible that the delights of Windermere with the 'only other' in the world are palling upon them already?"

"Oh, I don't think so," said Mamie. "Both Constance and St John are far too conventional to do anything so incorrect as to get tired of each other—yet!"

"Perhaps it would be more conventional if they *did* get tired of each other, Mamie!"

"I don't believe it!" replied Mamie bluntly. "People *can't* be such idiots as to choose each other for life and want to back out of their bargain in three weeks."

"The world is full of such idiots, my dear child."

"Did *you* get tired of Marion?"

"What a question! Am I tired of her to-day?"

"Then I suppose there are other people who know their own minds too?"

"Do you think you know your own mind, or will know it when the proper time comes?" he asked, smiling at the characteristic vehemence with which the girl gave her opinion.

A furious blush unexpectedly mantled Mamie's cheeks.

"Of course I shall!" she said. "I always do!"

"But many people who are quite sensible in other matters lose their heads with their hearts! Have you ever been in love, Mamie?"

"I don't like you when you ask such silly questions!" said Mamie. "We were talking about St John and Constance. They have come to the conclusion they ought not to remain away any longer, as the locum tenens is such a duffer. They are very anxious about poor Bobbit, too, and long to see you and Marion."

"It is kind of them," said Garth, his voice hardening with restrained emotion. "But they would have done better, on that account, to remain away a little—just a little longer. It will not console us to overcast their home-coming. For them there is the future—for us the past."

The young girl looked at him wistfully, then slipped her hand through his arm in her spontaneous, affectionate way.

"But you and Marion are young too, and you also love each other," she said. "Why should you talk as though you had nothing to look forward to because—because poor little Bobbit is to be taken away? Of course you are grieved, heart-broken; we all are. But you will have other children by-and-by."

"I will go upstairs and send Marion down to you," he said abruptly. "Or will you come up?"

"I should like to come up—if I may?"

"Don't stay long, then," he said. "You are a child yourself, and death, in any guise, is a pitiful and melancholy thing."

"Even when it brings peace to suffering?" she whispered.

"Why should there be any suffering?" demanded the man with sudden passion. "What is this earth—a satyr's plaything or the hell of another world? Sometimes the weight of its sorrow bears one to the ground. Wherever one turns, pain, grief, loss; life produced with travail only to be destroyed."

It was to himself he was talking, not to Mamie. He had forgotten her, gazing blankly at despair.

After lunch Marion resumed guard, and Garth went for a walk. It was low tide, and the sea attracted him. The sea was restless like himself, and its voice never asked questions

which he did not care to answer; it only murmured an accompaniment to his own thoughts.

He descended to the sand, and strolled along beside the high water-mark of weed.

He had played on this sand as a boy. It was curious to look back upon what he was then, and note the difference between the present and the future of which he had dreamed. In some ways he had justified the destiny he had anticipated so eagerly; in others—how he had failed in others! He still maintained that the misfortunes of his private life were undeserved, that sin had been thrust upon him by circumstances stronger than himself, but he could not help recognising how his domestic affairs had grown more and more complicated from that hour.

He paused at a pool in the sand and picked up a pebble, and threw it in. A score of ripples started to the surface instantly, and he watched the circles widen till they covered the pool. It was an emblem of his sin. The consequences lasted so much longer, and extended so much farther than the actual thing itself. A whole little world had been disturbed. A tiny green crab scuttled under a stone, the delicate fronds of a bunch of pink seaweed stirred, an anemone contracted to a sensitive lump of jelly, and a few distracted shrimps sought hurried shelter under a rocky shelf. And yet the pebble responsible for the agitation was lying quietly at the bottom of the pool.

Yes, circles widening, widening, ever widening from the moment he had committed the first sin of silence! The sea of life was larger than the pool on the sand, he was more than a pebble in it, and they were human hearts and human souls which his conduct was affecting, not shrimps and anemones.

Certainly unhappiness had spread in his neighbourhood of late as the rings in the pool—Vivian, Colonel Carew, Rachel, Marion. And now, through him, because he had not caused his wife enough pain already, they were to lose their child. If the pebble had not been cast—if he had not sinned—there would be peace and happiness instead of troubled waters around him.

But it was useless to look back—and the circles he had caused had widened already to the limits of the pool and would now begin to die away. Would not the human agitation around him

cease also by-and-by? Bobbit, the child!—whatever happened to the other ripples, the little circle of his life would spin to its end in a dreary day or two. Nothing could repair that mistake. He refused to regard it with Marion's eyes as a judgment of God; it was an accident, but an accident which hardened and embittered rather than frightened him; such an accident, in fact, as that which had brought his father to Carnruan. In both instances evil had come because he had sought to do good. In the first case, his father would not have recognised him if he had not interfered on Vivian's behalf; in the second, he had been engrossed, to his child's detriment, in his great achievement for humanity. Evidently a man was a fool to be a philanthropist in this world! If he had been as careless of the welfare of the world as wealthy men of Vivian's type, if he had had no brains, or allowed them to rust, or turned them to some selfish purpose of money-getting alone, he would have been considered a good fellow, his wife would have loved him still, and Bobbit would be well.

What a number of dismal reflections to be produced by a pebble in a pool! But the pool, combined with a peninsula of rock and the rising tide, stopped his walk, and he returned to the house.

The train went at six o'clock, and it was now half-past four. It was time to say good-bye to Bobbit; nevertheless, he did not go upstairs at once. He shrank from the necessity of this farewell, and postponed it as long as possible, wandering restlessly in and out of the lower rooms. He wished with all his heart that he was not obliged to go to London. It seemed particularly hard that this day of triumph—the day on which such a monument was to be erected to his genius—should mean no more to him than separation from his dying child.

He regretted he had not thought of ordering a special train, which would have minimised the period of his absence. But it was too late now.

At a quarter to five he went upstairs.

Marion sat by the cot holding Bobbit's hand, and she looked up as Garth approached.

"Is he asleep?" he whispered.

"No. Are you going now?"

"I have come to say good-bye to him."

Something in the phrase, simple and natural as it was, struck them both with agonising significance.

Marion's lips quivered. Garth bent over the child, and touched him more roughly, perhaps, than he knew in his emotion.

"Say good-bye to dada, darling. He is going to London for a little while."

Instead the child shrank with a cry of rage and fear.

"Do way—do way!"

"Don't you know me?" asked Garth. "It's dada. You'll kiss dada, won't you?"

But Bobbit would have nothing to say to him. Either the child was delirious or some wh. had entered his poor little head. He screamed at the proffered kiss, and struck the hand on his pillow and averted his face.

"Mamma! He's to do way!"

"Yes, darling." Marion hastily bent over the child. "But won't you kiss poor dada? He'll cry if you are so cruel to him."

Still Bobbit would not be reconciled. He scowled at his father.

"Ugly, ugly," he said. "Ugly man. Do way!"

She did not worry him any more. She put her arms round him, kneeling beside the bed, and he hid his face in her breast to shut out the "ugly man."

Garth's teeth were clenched. The little brain was wandering, of course, but it hurt him that Bobbit should turn from him at the last, whatever the cause; it hurt.

He took a last look at the child and left the room with bowed head and aching heart.

CHAPTER XXXVII

ALONE

THE ceremony was to take place in the afternoon, and Garth, who had travelled by the night train in order to leave Bobbit for as short a time as possible, had the whole morning to pass away.

He went home, but the house was empty and dismal without Marion and the child. If he could not stop Rachel's marriage, and Marion fulfilled her threat, the house would be always like this: a mere shelter, not a home.

This reflection set him thinking about Rachel again. Whichever way he turned the prospect was gloomy, and probably no successful man had ever gone to the scene of his triumph with feelings of greater depression than he would go. But to the public he was the physician, not the man. His private affairs were nobody's business but his own, and he would have to keep them out of sight to-day at any rate.

When he set off at last for the scene of the ceremony he wondered if he would have believed, once upon a time, that the height of success could find him so miserable. The flags and bunting seemed an insult to the woman who was watching down in Cornwall by the bedside of her dying child; it was an effort of heroism to smile, to throw off his own cares and forget the father in the scientist.

But the effort had to be made. He was greeted with wild enthusiasm by the crowd, the royal personages shook hands with him warmly when he received them and remained in conversation with him for some time. His Royal Highness made a speech full of graceful allusions to Dr Garth, and the stone was laid amidst great enthusiasm.

It was a scene which no man could regard unmoved, least of all the man most concerned. The immense concourse of people, for whom he was the focus of interest, the cheers, the excitement, took him out of himself at last. Enthusiasm is infectious, and he was a little god to-day. Unconsciously his blood warmed, his eyes brightened, his cheeks glowed; unconsciously he yielded to the magnetic waves of emotion which moved the crowd. Once more he realised the greatness of his achievement, and his old dreams of a world regenerated through him became fact. How many men could boast of such a thing? What other life was as valuable as his? Yes, the ambition of his boyhood had been fulfilled: he was the benefactor of the human race he loved. What did it matter that he was obliged to pave his way to success by the ruin of Vivian Carew, of a dozen like him?

Every faith which is to save souls must have its martyrs; every battle for liberty must cost its lives; so this discovery, which was to conquer one of the worst scourges of the age, must have its list of victims! Marion's view was limited, narrow—the woman's view; as no woman could make a great general, no woman was capable of realising the righteousness of sacrificing one for the good of many.

His heart swelled; his soul soared nearer heaven as the people called him by name in a frenzy of excitement. Hats were doffed, handkerchiefs waved, women threw flowers.

It was four o'clock. The Prince and Princess were leaving, cheers greeted their departure, but there were still more for him.

A telegraph boy, who had made his way up to the platform, handed a telegram to Dr Garth.

He took it mechanically and opened it. He seemed to stand alone, of a sudden, among the people for whom he had bought the right to labour at such a price. The cheers sank to a mere hum as though dulled by distance, the sunlight, the bunting, the sea of faces grew dim. Yes, he was alone—alone—alone although they loved him.

"Bobbie died at three o'clock," he read. "Rachel."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

GOD'S WILL

"MARION, will you come out for a walk?"

There was no answer. The woman's blank eyes did not swerve from the sea.

"It is a beautiful day, and there are so many roses in the cottage gardens. Come, dear."

Rachel took the hand of her brother's wife, but Marion made no response by word or sign. She did not even turn her head when she was addressed, or show she was aware that Rachel and Stephen were in the room.

"Marion, darling, do arouse yourself!" cried Rachel im-

ploringly. "You are making us all so miserable. Think of the living as well as the dead. Think of your uncle, of Stephen, of me; we all love you."

This time Marion looked round. But her eyes were vacant and the pupils dilated; she seemed to be gazing through Rachel at something a long way off, and then once more she turned her head towards the window and the sloping lawn, and the ocean which beat for ever upon the strand.

"Oh, Stephen," said Rachel, "what is to be done? It is awful to see her like this. It is as though her soul were dead!"

Garth came forward then. Throughout he had watched Rachel's attempt to arouse his wife with agonising anxiety.

On his return to Carnruan he had found her in this state. The stupor had begun, they told him, from the hour of Bobbit's death, and even the funeral, which had taken place to-day, had not awakened her from this lethargy of excessive grief. All day long she sat in the same attitude, with her hands lying idle in her lap and her face turned towards the sea. It was just the same to her whether anyone were in the room or not. She noticed nobody; she never spoke; she would not have thought of eating and drinking, or going to bed and getting up, if Rachel, who was staying at Poldinnick to take care of her, had not tended her like a sister.

She was as obedient and as helpless as a child, as mechanical as a clock. If she were led from her place at the drawing-room window to the dining-room she did not resist; if food were put before her she ate; if Rachel took her by the hand and said it was time to go to bed, she went to bed. She had no will of her own. Her state was almost like death, and it was a death of the senses. She seemed to feel nothing, neither grief, nor heat, nor cold, nor hunger, nor fatigue. Her wide eyes were never tired of staring; rain might have beaten upon her without producing any effect, or inducing her to seek shelter; a gun might have been fired off in the room without calling forth a remark. It was only the husk of the woman which was alive; her mere flesh and bone and blood; her brain was stunned—the soul of her sleeping with the body of her child.

Garth approached her and took one of her idle, listless hands.

It was blue and chilled, and the pulse beat slowly and feebly. When he let it go it dropped back into its former position on her lap.

Her worst symptom of all was that she did not sleep. She had not slept since Bobbit died. No drugs had any effect upon her. All through the night, Rachel told him, she lay staring at the dark as by day she stared at the sea. If she continued in this way much longer insanity or death would be the result.

"Marion," he said, "do you know me?"

No answer.

"Do you remember that Bobbit is dead?"

Still no reply.

He bent down, and kissed her on the cheek. She did not repulse him as she would have done when she was in her proper senses; she did not even flush. She simply took no notice of him at all. Even his caress could not shock her back to life!

"Marion, Marion! Speak to me! O my God, I cannot let you go!"

He kissed her again passionately on the cheek and lips—those lips of hers which had been forbidden to him so long. He knelt and clasped her in his arms. He would have been thankful now to be thrust away.

But she showed no sign of recognition or even of consciousness. Her face was as stiff and motionless as that of a wooden doll. Directly he let her go she relapsed into her old attitude.

"Oh, Stephen!" cried Rachel, with a gasping sob.

He gave her a shamefaced look, very white.

"I had forgotten you were in the room," he said.

"You are awfully fond of her, aren't you? Shall I go away?"

"I don't care," he said indifferently.

She looked pained, but slipped to the door without response. On the threshold he stopped her.

"Forgive me, Rachel. You are a good sister, the best a man ever had, but at present I can think of no one save her."

"It is very natural. I am not hurt. We are all thinking of her now. It seems so hard that you, with all your science, can do nothing for her."

"Oh, my science!" He sighed heavily. "Bobbit died."

"It is God's will after all," said the girl, awestricken. "We are only puppets. We do what we can; we are as we are made!"

"I did not know you were a fatalist, Rachel."

"Oh, I don't know what I am," she said pettishly. "What's the use of talking and guessing? Everything is a hopeless muddle, that is all one can see."

When the door shut behind her he returned to Marion's side. She had heard nothing, she heeded nothing. He wondered whether she would have shown any sign of life if he could have brought the child back from the grave to her.

He stood musing over a phrase Rachel had used:

"It is God's will after all."

Was she right? Was Marion right? The religious view and the fatalist's view led after all to the same end: that the success of man's aims depended upon God's will as well as his own exertions. Was there really a higher power which took the trouble to interfere in all these minute human affairs? Were the misfortunes which had beset him of late the punishment of sin? Was it possible that Marion's judgment was the correct one, and that it was more than a woman's sentiment, a great truth of life, which he had sneered at as he went his way?

The shadow of deep thought settled over the man's face. His eyes rested upon Marion with an expression of increasing anguish. She was still more to him than anyone in the world, and her state wrung his heart. If she followed their child to the churchyard on the hill, what would be left to him? His work, however beneficial to the world, would not console him for the lifelong loneliness, the double loss he would never forget.

If she could only sleep! Something in her passive attitude made her look younger to him even than her years. She no longer repulsed him, regarded him with reproach. She might have been the girl he had married—the girl, young and innocent, who had loved him, and thought him one of the wonders of the world.

It was so long since he had dared to touch her. He took her hand again, and the contact fired him with more than his old passion for her. She was nearer to him to-day than when he

had courted her. She was his wife, the mother of his child, and even the sacrifice he had refused her seemed an easier task at this moment than that of saying good-bye to her for ever. Because he had borne the death of his child like a man this new grief attacked him. The hosts of an invincible enemy surrounded him, stabbing him in his most vulnerable parts.

Worn out with many nights of watching, with emotions of every kind, he bowed his face in his hands.

"Oh, God," he said, "am I accursed? Must I lose her too?"

It was a sound which made him look up at last—the sound of gentle breathing. Marion had fallen asleep in the arm-chair.

CHAPTER XXXIX

ST JOHN'S CURIOSITY IS AROUSED

THE lamps were lighted, and Constance sat alone in her own drawing-room for the first Friday evening of her life.

Everything looked very pretty. The Vicarage was a quaint old house, of moderate size, full of odd nooks and stairways and leaded windows, and Constance's furniture could not have had a more suitable setting. Without being exactly artistic she had the correct eye which is the product of cultivation, and she knew exactly the value of the beautiful Sheraton chairs, the Chipendale cabinets, and the old Nankin china which filled the shelves.

She was embroidering an afternoon tea-cloth with sprays of forget-me-nots, designed to tone with her blue drawing-room, and pausing to select a fresh needleful of silk her eyes wandered round her with the complacency of the proud possessor. Constance was happy. She was pleased with herself, with St John, with her new home, which was all that a refined taste could desire. There was nothing to grate in any way. St John was a husband of whom any woman might be proud; he was brilliant, handsome, attractive, good-tempered. Both her parents liked him, and thought well of him, and he liked them; and her home, although obviously not the abode of wealth, was as obviously that of re-

finement and good taste. The home-coming would have been perfect if it had not been for poor little Bobbit's death. Naturally St John was grieved on his brother's account, and Constance through him. She was fond of children, and had admired Bobbit so much, and really felt a great deal of sympathy for the bereaved parents.

Nevertheless, she looked very well. The loss was only near enough to make her thankful it was no nearer. Her complexion was as fresh as ever, her shapely shoulders were a little plumper, her hands were even whiter, and the nails pinker and more polished than formerly. In her manner, which had never lacked self-possession, was the indefinable assurance of the married woman. She was placed; she had no more to think about. She had obtained her partner for life, and done well.

When she snipped off an end of silk with her embroidery scissors she placed the fragment carefully in the work-basket instead of letting it drop on the floor, as an untidy or careless woman would have done. She had been drilled in the habits of order; but it was her nature to be orderly; no amount of "bringing up" could have had a similar effect upon Rachel or Mamie.

She had just begun a shaded petal when the door opened and St John came in. He held a few sheets of manuscript in his hand, fastened by a brass clip.

"Have you written your sermon?" she asked.

"Yes. May I read it to you? I want your opinion, Constance."

He drew a chair beside her, and the soft yellow light fell through the lamp shade on both fair heads. They made rather a pretty picture—St John handsome, flushed, eager; Constance in an attitude of attention with her hands lying idle in her lap.

By-and-by St John was to improvise from mere headlines; he had eloquence enough; but they were both agreed that the first Sunday at Carnruan would be an ordeal, and it was safest to know exactly what he was going to say. Ordinarily he was not nervous; but all the people knew him here, and had known him from a child, and would be naturally more critical of him than of a stranger.

He had a beautiful voice, with many tones in it, and Constance, who was intended to criticise, lost herself as he read on. He felt his subject; he had the fire of youth, the fervour of the enthusiast. It was his soul which he put into words, and he carried Constance away. She forgot her blue china, her Chippendale furniture, her cultivation, her social position as the Bishop of Porthminster's daughter. She forgot the little aims and ambitions—all natural and harmless enough, no doubt—for St John's future; her intentions with regard to her visiting list, her pride in her beautiful hair and hands. Her flesh thrilled, her cheeks flushed; she listened without a word, lost in the glorious dream of regeneration which the words of a young believer, who was half a poet, had aroused. Fire ran through his sentences; they were alive with the joys of heaven and the pains of hell, and absorbed in his own creation he did not notice that she had not spoken at all until his sermon had come to an end.

Then the young man looked at his wife, and found her sitting silent with downcast eyes, and his heart misgave him.

"Is—is it rubbish, Constance?" he faltered. "Perhaps it is not quite restrained enough—quite dignified? I am inclined to be a little too emotional. But they must be stirred, and it is useless to be subtle with a village congregation."

"It is splendid," she said. "You will be a great man, St John. Even I, who think so much of you, had no idea you could compose such a sermon."

"Oh, Constance!" he exclaimed, flushing with pleasure. "Your praise," he added, "is the best encouragement I could receive. But are you sure—are you sure it is good, or is it only your love for me which deceives you?"

"I am quite sure it is good."

He rose to embrace her in the exuberance of his joy, and there was a little lovers' interlude which brought the roses to Constance's cheeks. There was quite another expression on her face when she gazed at St John and at other people—an expression soft, rapt, womanly. She was indeed very fond of him.

"How I love you, Constance," he said. "If it were not for poor Stephen, I should be perfectly happy."

"Yes," she said; "it must be a dreadful thing to lose an only

child. Nevertheless, I must say I am rather surprised at the way Marion takes it."

"How do you mean?"

"She is supposed to be a religious woman. I should have thought she would have shown more resignation."

"I am thankful she is getting better," said St John. "Stephen has had enough trouble lately. The child's death must more than temper his success. He does not say so—he does not speak of his feelings at all—but one can easily imagine that he finds his discovery too dearly paid for. The stone over Bobbit's grave is to be put up to-morrow. He is the first Garth in Carn-ruan churchyard, poor little chap."

"By the way," said Constance, "where was your father buried, St John?"

"My father?" he repeated thoughtfully. "Upon my word, Constance, I am ashamed to say I do not know!"

"How strange!" she said. "Has it never occurred to you to ask?"

"You see, he died when I was very young," replied St John. "He is only a name to me, and I do not remember being told exactly when and where his death occurred. My mother never speaks of him. Now you come to mention it, I should like to know."

"We shall see your mother to-morrow," she said. "Let us ask her. It is absurd that you should not know. Suppose anyone else happened to put the question to you! It would look so indifferent, so unfilial, if you could not answer."

"Yes; I will ask my mother," he said. "I cannot imagine how I could have shown such a lack of curiosity. A girl"—he smiled—"would have known long ago. I have no doubt Rachel and Mamie could inform me!"

CHAPTER XL

MRS GARTH SPEAKS

THE next morning Mamie, who was always an early riser, emerged from the house before breakfast, and walked down the road to meet the postman.

The Haven was the last house on his round in this direction, and lately she had taken it into her head to save the old man the trouble of coming to the door. This may have been instigated by consideration for his rheumatism, or a deeper motive known only to the young lady herself. It was certain that she had begun to show an interest in his satchel which was quite a new phase in her history.

"Have you any letters for us this morning, Bolt?" she asked eagerly.

Yes, miss. Here's one for your sister, and——"

"One for me!" cried Mamie, snatching them from his hand. "You are a tease, Bolt! Why couldn't you have told me at once?"

A glance at the envelope addressed to her showed her a familiar masculine handwriting and an Australian stamp. She had been expecting this letter for some time, and a sensation of restfulness succeeded the irritability of suspense.

She slipped the Australian letter into her pocket, and bolted like a rabbit for a particular corner of the little garden where there was a seat screened from the house by a clump of bushes. There she opened the letter, which was from Adolphus Wetherby, of course, and characteristic in style. He said he was well, and that he was leading a hard, busy life, in the saddle for many hours a day, and fit for nothing when he came home but supper and bed.

"The old man," he wrote, "is one of the biggest sheep owners in the country, and must be piling up the dollars in stacks; but he goes about perpetually in the same old clothes, and doesn't seem to think a fellow can want more than a good bed and plenty to eat. I only get one day a month off, and then it is a treat to ride into town and chat with the fellows, and see women about the streets. Our nearest neighbour is ten miles off, and as deaf as a post. One almost forgets how to talk. But I am not dissatisfied. You shall not be able to say I am a 'rolling stone.' The life is healthy, the climate splendid, and I believe the old man will give me a chance to do something for myself by-and-by, when he thinks I know enough.

"Don't forget me, Mamie! I am thinking about you all the time and our talk at the Rocking Stone."

Mamie went in to breakfast.

"I met Bolt," she said calmly. "Here is a letter for you, Rachel."

"Is that all?" asked Rachel, recognising the writing of a school friend indifferently.

"That is all for you," replied Mamie.

She did not tell lies, but she reserved facts. If she mentioned Wetherby's letter Rachel might ask to see it out of friendly interest, and then she would want to know what they had talked about at the Rocking Stone.

After breakfast Rachel and Mamie went to Poldinnick as usual to ask after Marion, who was slowly regaining her health, so it happened that Mrs Garth was alone when Constance and St John called.

She was as proud of her younger son's marriage as of Stephen's, and disposed to see a great deal more in Constance than the girls would admit. Naturally it was a great pleasure to her to have St John settled so near, and she rose in a little better to meet them.

Constance kissed her mother-in-law dutifully. Mrs Garth, who showed no disposition to interfere with the domestic arrangements at the Vicarage, and entertained a visible respect for the Bishop's daughter, was quite satisfactory to Constance, who had made up her mind to get on with everybody at Carnruan, as long as they remembered her position as St John's wife.

They talked about Marion first of all, and St John's sermon for to-morrow, and then St John broached the subject which he and his wife had been discussing over-night.

"By the way, mother," he said, "Constance put me to shame last evening by asking a question I could not answer. Where was my father buried?"

Mrs Garth caught at her breath, and cast a startled glance at her son and daughter-in-law.

"Where was your father buried?" she repeated. "You—you wish to know?"

"We were talking about poor little Bobbit," he said, "and naturally occurred to Constance to inquire the name of my father's resting-place. I cannot imagine how it is I have never heard it mentioned."

A faint flush had overspread Mrs Garth's withered cheeks. She lowered her eyes and locked her hands nervously. It was a difficult and painful position in which she found herself. She was too conscientious a woman to take refuge in a lie. Hitherto none of her younger children had asked this question. They had respected the curtain which her silence drew over the past, and made no attempt to look behind it. That Constance might arouse St John's curiosity regarding his father by questions natural in a girl entering a new family, had not occurred to her, and she was totally unprepared. It was impossible to consult Stephen, even to take time to think. St John and Constance were awaiting her answer, and her imagination magnified their mild curiosity at her delay into suspicion of a secret.

The poor woman's lips quivered. How could she tell her son outright that she did not know where his father was buried, or name a place at random? In the latter case St John might take it into his head to make a filial excursion to the grave, which did not exist, and discover to his horror and grief that his mother's statement was false. No; she could not do it. She turned red and white, and red and white again.

"I am sorry you have asked me this question, St John. It is a very painful subject."

"I am sorry, mother, too, if I have distressed you. I am aware that you do not care to speak of my father and his death. But it is natural, surely, that I should feel an interest in knowing?"

Mrs Garth's agitation grew.

"Do not press me, St John," she said. "There are reasons why it is better to let this subject rest."

"You mystify me, mother," he exclaimed in great surprise. "Why on earth should I not know the whereabouts of my father's grave?"

"If you insist," said Mrs Garth, "I must tell you the truth, although it will grieve you to hear it. I cannot tell you where your father is buried, because I do not know that he is dead. He was alive when I came to Carnruan, but I have neither seen nor heard anything of him since."

"Mother!" St John grew very pale. He did not know what

still more awful revelations awaited him. "Do you mean that—that he was not a good man, that he deserted you?"

"He was not a good man, but it was I who left him," replied Mrs Garth. "Oh, it is bitter to be obliged to relate this miserable story, and before your wife! Why did you not rest content in your ignorance? We kept it from you and the girls, Stephen and I, for your good. But as you know so much, in justice to myself and your brother you must know all. Your father was an incorrigible drunkard, a spendthrift, a bad husband, a bad father. If I could have borne the life he led me I dared not allow my children to grow up in such an atmosphere. It was for this reason that I left him—having some money of my own—and brought you all to Carnruan. Stephen was old enough to remember and understand; but I did not wish to overshadow your younger lives, so I let you forget; and the people of Carnruan, always seeing me dressed in black, concluded of their own accord that I was a widow. God knows I did what I did for the best. Stephen approves. Can you blame me, St John?"

She looked at her son for praise or blame; and St John turned anxious eyes on his wife, seeking her opinion. If she were disappointed, if she felt that she should have been told before she married him! A disreputable father, who might still be in existence! He could scarcely realise it. The young priest's blood was curdled by the notion of such unexpected disgrace.

Constance behaved very well, although she looked grave.

"I am sure your mother did what was wise and right, St John," she said. "Thank Heaven, your father does not know where you are, and nobody has heard of his existence!"

"Stephen," said Mrs Garth, "is convinced he is dead, and I begin to think he is right. While you were children he could not find us, but now that Stephen is so well known it would have been easy for him to do so."

"It is a great shock to me," murmured St John, "a great shock. I thought there was nothing to be ashamed of in our family. I have congratulated myself on it so many times."

He blinked away tears, and Mrs Garth began to weep softly.

"It wasn't my fault," she said. "I loved him when I married him."

"Of course, no one thinks of blaming you, mother. We only pity you—and ourselves. Nevertheless, it seems to me we ought to find out whether he is alive or dead."

"Stephen has already attempted to do so in vain."

"It should not be an impossible task," said St John, "and it would be more satisfactory to us all, I am sure, to know the truth. There is no occasion to tell Rachel or Mamie, eh, Constance?"

"None at all," she replied. "Let us discuss the subject with your brother. He is the head of the family. He will be able to tell us, too, what has been done."

CHAPTER XLI

"REPENT!"

MARION, though still weak, was now much better, and daily improving in health, and Garth became impatient to return to London.

"Remain a few days longer if you like," he said, "and if you think the air does you good. But it is time I went."

"I do not think my uncle is well," she responded. "Have you noticed how shaky he has become lately? I was struck by it yesterday as he was walking on the lawn. I feel reluctant to leave him."

Colonel Carew had been attacked by a stroke of paralysis some weeks ago, and Marion's remark made Garth look grave.

"I must confess I have been too absorbed in other matters," he said, "to observe him as I should have done. It may be no more than a temporary weakness which is affecting him. I hope so."

Later in the day, however, he renewed the subject abruptly:

"You are quite right about the Colonel, Marion; I don't like his symptoms at all."

"Then don't, I beg of you, leave me alone with him," she

said. "If he is taken ill I shall be so frightened. This boy who has succeeded poor old Macdonald here knows nothing."

"You are not strong enough to make a sick nurse of yourself again," he replied. "Return to London with me."

"And desert my poor uncle?" she exclaimed. "I am surprised that you should suggest such a thing! Whose place is it to be with him when he needs care, if not mine?"

Garth sighed, and gave up the contest. He could not deny that the Colonel was in a bad way or the correctness of Marion's argument. But he fidgeted at his enforced inaction. In work alone could he find temporary forgetfulness of the numberless unhappy thoughts which beset him. His patients wanted him in London, too. For once he was sacrificing the many to one, which was contrary to his code. Nevertheless, he could not desert Vivian's father, especially when Marion bade him stay. He had injured this unfortunate family enough. To remain so long a guest at Poldinnick grated upon him, however, and he suggested they should stay with his mother for a while.

She knew why her husband choked sometimes over her uncle's bread and salt, and was not a stranger to the feeling herself, but she always conquered it, knowing the Colonel liked to have her in the house.

"You go to The Haven if you like," she said, "but I must stay here."

"My mother will wonder, Marion," he reminded her huskily.

"I do not think so," she replied. "She will understand, if you put it properly, that you wish to see more of her and the girls, and that I cannot leave my uncle. Is it not time to get ready for church?"

"You are not coming? It will tire you."

"It will not tire me to listen to St John's first sermon at Carnruan."

Colonel Carew remained at home, and husband and wife, both in deep mourning, walked down the carriage drive and up the hill to the church together.

"Do you remember the first Sunday of our engagement?" he asked abruptly.

"Yes; I remember," she said, looking away. "You were called

out of church to see –the body, were you not? And afterwards you went over to the Island.”

“I was thinking that you loved me then,” he answered in a low tone.

At the gate they found Constance awaiting them. She told Garth that St John wished to speak to him after the service, and they entered the church together.

It gave Garth a peculiar feeling to see his brother in the pulpit instead of the old Vicar. He regarded the young man curiously, wondering what it was like to possess St John’s faith, and what St John would have done in his place. He remembered his brother’s strenuous verdict upon the story he had told the Bishop that day at Porthminster. Yes, St John would have behaved differently. But it was all a matter of temperament. Everything lay in the point of view.

“Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

Garth tingled. The text was as apt as though his brother had chosen it for him.

With an involuntary start he raised his eyes to the young preacher’s face. Either by accident or intention, St John was gazing at him, and as he did so he repeated his text :

“Repent ye, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand.”

Did he know anything? Wild thoughts shot through Garth’s mind. His secret was no longer in his own keeping; Marion knew it, Rachel, and Tregenna. The women would not betray him. But the man! Tregenna had no more reason to like than to dislike him; certainly no reason to screen him at Vivian’s expense. At any moment an act of impertinence on Rachel’s part, a quarrel, might terminate the engagement, and turn the mine owner into a bitter enemy, only too glad to ruin the family to which Rachel belonged.

A moment later he smiled at his own folly. St John had repeated himself out of nervousness, that was all, and his gaze, probably unconscious, had already wandered away. Of course, he knew nothing. It was only chance which had dictated his subject, and Garth sat back listening, with folded arms, beside his wife.

St John’s young voice, clear, musical, fervid, rang through the

dim old church. He was nervous at the beginning, but he soon forgot himself, because he was in earnest, and a spark of his brother's genius, developed in another way, animated his soul.

"How can you live in sin," he asked, "knowing you may be called to judgment to-morrow, to-night? You feel secure perhaps; you think the goods of this world are substance, and the bliss or pain to come mere shadows, which you can disregard. But will you feel like this when you are dying? Will the money, the glory, or the honours for which you bartered your soul, comfort you then? Will you feel as wise when night falls as in the sunlight? Will you feel as positive that you know more than Peter and Paul, and the Christ they followed? Oh, my sisters and brothers, do not postpone your repentance till too late! Conquer your greed of wealth, your pride of intellect, your stubbornness and wilfulness, whatever the particular sin most dear to you may be. Remember that all you have gained in this world you must leave behind you in this world, and that your soul alone, and what your actions make it, shall endure for ever."

Garth did not look at Marion, his eyes were fixed upon his brother's, but he felt her looking at him. He would not turn his head. His teeth were set, his muscles braced and tense despite the apparent ease of his attitude. They were only a boy's ideas, of course; trite convention coloured by hysteria. He taught what he had been taught. It was good for common minds, no doubt. A sigh or two broke forth near Garth as from surcharged hearts. It was a mistake to say that the lower classes were stolid; they were the most emotional of all. The feebleness of the intellect, the less cultivated, the easier the owner was to move.

"For my part," continued St John, "I cannot conceive how any man should think it worth while, apart from higher motives, to sacrifice eternity for the sake of procuring the gratification of our few brief years here. You Cornishmen are reputed to have long heads; you are good business men. If you had a fortune left you would you spend it all to-morrow, and leave yourselves penniless for the rest of your lives? Yet the welfare of your soul, which is yourself, your one enduring possession, you will

jeopardise to acquire the goods of this world or the indulgence of some desire! What folly, what madness! Oh, believe me, there is no happiness in sin! You may persuade yourselves for the moment that the attainment of your aim is enough, but nothing, nothing is worth the forfeit of your peace of mind. It would be better to live in poverty and obscurity all your days than to forego God's grace and wander homeless and lost without the fold."

A slight sound, like a moan, made Garth glance at Marion. She was leaning back in the high, old-fashioned pew with closed eyes, looking very white.

A twinge contracted his features. He bent towards her, and whispered.

"You are faint? You were not strong enough to walk up the hill. I advised you not to come."

"I am not tired," she replied.

"You are weaker than you know," said Garth.

It was true. Usually her emotions were better controlled. Now two tears trickled from under her eyelids and rolled slowly down her cheeks.

"Let me take you home," added Garth tensely.

"No; I will wait till the end of the service."

He could not insist. He leaned back again. His face was impassive, but his teeth were clenched. He looked at her no more until they were all rising to leave the church.

"St John wishes to speak to me," he said. "Rachel will take you home."

She joined the girls without response, and he went to the vestry to wait for St John.

The young fellow was flushed, in a brilliant mood. He had felt himself to be in touch with his audience; he had seen that the people were moved, and it had given him that confidence in himself which goes so far towards influencing others.

"Well? What did you think of my sermon?" he asked.

"It was good stuff," said Garth, "for villagers. You are quite right not to talk over the heads of the people. I was afraid you were going to bring the taint of Oxford into a pulpit; so many young clergymen make the mistake of being too clever."

"That tastes like a pill with a sugar coating," said St John, smiling. "Do you mean it for a compliment?"

"Certainly, my dear fellow. I was absolving you from a suspicion of pedantry. A village priest must keep his learning to himself, and descend to the level of the illiterate mind. I think the people were touched; I saw several handkerchiefs out among the women, and there were two distinct choruses of sniffs. Old Pengelly kept awake, too. It is the first time he has been done out of his usual Sunday morning sleep for years, I am sure! . . . Constance says you want to speak to me. What is it?"

They were leaving the church by this time. St John locked the door behind him, and the brothers emerged from the porch together on to the high, wind-swept path.

St John had grown serious.

"Yes," he said; "I want to speak to you. Mother told me something yesterday which caused me intense surprise—surprise mingled with grief. It seems incredible I did not know all these years that our father was alive."

"Ah!" Garth's exclamation was one of vexation, almost anger. "Why did she tell you? We had always agreed there was no necessity for you younger ones to know."

"Poor mother, she could not help herself very well. Constance reminded me to ask where he was buried—a question I should have asked long ago. I respect my mother for the courage and truthfulness of her reply. She could not have kept me in the dark any longer without telling a downright lie. It was a shock, Stephen."

"No doubt. But you need not worry yourself. It might have been worse. Nothing has come out, and he is dead."

"But *is* he dead?" asked St John restlessly. "How do you know?"

"He must be dead, or I should have heard of him before. He would have blackmailed me. Blackmail is a nice word to use in connection with one's father, I am aware," admitted Garth bitterly, "but I know him. You, fortunately, were too young to remember."

"I do not hesitate to accept your opinion of him, boy as you were, and mother's," said St John. "She is the best of women,

and it makes this discovery doubly painful to me to think how unhappy her married life must have been. I have always pictured something so different. Nevertheless, this man, whatever his vices, was our father. We must take some interest in him, alive or dead. Both Constance and I think——"

"Constance knows?" interrupted Stephen, frowning.

"Yes. My mother told us both. Does it matter? I cannot have any secrets from my wife, Stephen."

"No. You are a newly married man," responded Garth. "But you are right. Why should Constance not know everything? She is one of the family."

"As she was present when I questioned mother it was impossible not to take her into our confidence," said St John. "But I agree with you that there is no occasion to tell Rachel and Mamie. So painful a revelation need not reach their ears. What there is to be done can be done quietly, between ourselves. Of course, we must discover what has become of him."

"I have already caused inquiries to be made," said Garth. "Did not mother tell you?"

"Yes. She said you had made inquiries which had failed. But we cannot let the matter drop so quickly, Stephen. If he is alive we should know what he is doing. He may be in need. And while there is life," faltered the young priest, "there is hope of repentance. One must do one's duty, however distasteful it may be."

"I am afraid," said Stephen in a harsh tone, "the time of repentance is past for him."

"Do not say so," said St John. "I would rather he were living, at any cost to ourselves, than that he had died in sin. I do not think we ought to relax our exertions until we find out what has become of him."

"If you take my advice St John, you will save your trouble and your money," said Garth. "It is too late. You can do nothing."

"But that is only a surmise, I presume?" questioned St John. "He may be in another part of the world—sunk so low that he has not even heard of your success."

"Sunk so low," murmured Garth.

A smile, curious, faint, curved his lips. His eyes were resting musingly upon a grave at his feet—the slab of grey stone which the parish had erected over the tomb of “Joe Williams.”

“Yes; it is probable he has not heard, as you say, of my success. But I should not look for him, St John, or make yourself miserable by discussing a sordid subject with your wife. Be happy while you can—and forget. Let him rest with the past—no more than a name, as he has ever been, to you.”

“But he is my father,” said St John huskily, “One must do something!”

“Then pray for him,” said Garth, with that faint smile still lingering on his lips.

A breath came from the sea, salt-laden, biting fresh, and stirred the dank grass; a gull circled shrieking above their heads. The bird’s discordant cry added meaning to the grim grey grave.

CHAPTER XLII

THE COLONEL’S WILL

A DAY or two later Colonel Carew was attacked by the second stroke of paralysis Garth had expected, and died a few hours later.

Marion was very grieved. But the magnitude of the first shock—Bobbit’s death—diminished that of any other loss, and she could not help realising that it was a ruined, disappointed man who had gone to a rest not undesired.

Poldinnick had become a house of gloom, and she felt she would never wish to see it again. Her husband, who had returned in the Colonel’s last hours, waited with her, however, for the funeral, and the reading of the will, concerning which Marion was very anxious on Vivian’s behalf.

To her dismay, it was discovered that her uncle had left her his entire property, which was unentailed, excepting a handsome legacy to Garth, whom he appointed executor, and various small sums to old servants and tenants, and a thousand pounds each to Rachel and Mamie Garth.

Husband and wife exchanged haggard looks across the room,

which was filled with persons interested in the will. Marion scarcely heard the lawyer's congratulations. All the money which her uncle's bequest represented seemed piled upon her head and shoulders, weighing her to the ground.

While the other legatees partook of wine and biscuits in the hall before going their various ways, she stood at a window apart, with pale cheeks and quivering lips.

When they had come one by one to take leave of her, and the lawyer had driven off on his way to the station, she spoke to Garth at last.

"Vivian was not even mentioned in the will!"

"No," he said gravely.

Her hands locked.

"If the house were to fall on me it would be no more than I deserved! Of course, I shall not touch a penny of the money. I regard myself as his trustee, no more."

"I have no objections to raise."

"We must find him and tell him so."

"Very well."

"It will cut him to the heart that he was not mentioned in the will," she said. "Poor boy, poor boy!"

"I shall give my legacy," said Garth, "to the poor."

They were obliged to remain a few days longer at Carnruan. There were many things for Garth to attend to, and he performed his duties rigorously, with the feeling that they were executed for Vivian rather than for Marion. Vivian was now provided for, thanks to the will which left Marion free to obey the dictates of her conscience, and if he continued to avoid recapture there was no reason why he should not settle somewhere abroad under another name, and lead a comfortable life.

It was a relief when Garth's work was over, and they were able to think of leaving on the morrow. The house was to be shut up until they could communicate with Vivian and discover what he would like done with it. Meanwhile the old butler and his wife, who was the housekeeper, and a couple of under servants and gardeners, were to take charge of it. The horses Garth sold.

Already the place wore a dismantled and deserted air. All

small articles of value had been packed away under Marion's superintendence. Everything was for Vivian. She was as scrupulous as though he were legally the heir, and she was no more than a stranger, an agent deputed to look after his interests in his absence. Only one thing she took, because she knew he would have given it to her willingly, and that was a portrait of father and son, painted about a year before Vivian's arrest, by an artist of renown.

They had been happy and united then. She liked to think of that time, when there had been nothing but pleasant memories and affection between the old soldier and his only son.

Garth was engaged in docketing certain papers which were to go, with the silver and other valuables, to the bank, when his brother was shown in.

"How are you, St John?"

"You are still busy, I see," said the young vicar.

"Yes; I am very anxious to get back to London. My patients will desert me soon."

"You can afford to play pranks with your practice, it seems to me," said St John. "Your wife must be a rich woman. 'Unto everyone that hath shall be given'!"

Garth did not smile.

"Yes; Marion's own fortune was a large one," he replied. "She does not consider her uncle's property belongs to her during Vivian's lifetime."

"Why not?" asked St John. "If the Colonel left everything to her it was because he wished her, not his son, to have it."

"The Colonel was, unfortunately, labouring under the opinion that Vivian was guilty," said Garth quietly—"an opinion which Marion and I do not happen to share."

"I cannot help thinking," said St John, "that you are unduly biassed in his favour. He was fairly tried and convicted. But I came to speak to you on a matter which may make you change your mind about him. I have discovered that our father was alive less than three years ago."

Garth raised his head and looked fixedly at his brother. His voice was hard and grating when he spoke at last.

"How did you discover it?"

"Like you, I employed a detective," admitted St John. "I could not rest easy without making some effort, despite your idea that he must be dead. And my detective was more successful than yours. He found out that our father had been known by several aliases, and had gained a precarious living on the 'Turf.'"

The elder brother sat rigid in his chair.

"He was known by several aliases," he repeated, "and gained a precarious living on the Turf. Well?"

"He was leading a disreputable existence," muttered St John hoarsely; "there is no doubt about it. I shiver to think of what it must have been. Oh, Stephen, if we had only known in time we might have saved him!"

"I doubt it," said Garth. "It is my experience that nothing reforms a man at that age. But you say 'might have saved him'? Then it is too late?"

"I fear so. He was last seen at Epsom three years ago. From that day to this no more has been heard of him."

"I told you," said Garth, "that he must be dead."

"A startling fact has cropped up in the course of the investigation. It seems he had some Turf dealings with Vivian Carew."

Garth felt his colour change despite himself.

"Then I fear," he said, "that Vivian's troubles were partly caused by our amiable parent. It is an unpleasant reflection!"

"Unpleasant is scarcely the word for it. I—I am filled with horror, Stephen; we seem to be standing before a curtain which may be drawn aside to reveal a frightful spectacle at any moment. Do you not see whither their connection points? The man who was murdered here, Joe Williams, was an elderly man; he came to Carnruan to demand hush-money of Vivian Carew; the landlord of the Pilchard heard them talking about the Turf. The description of Joe Williams tallies with that of our father, who was seen before the murder, but never afterwards!"

"You mean it was he who was—found?"

"Yes. Does not the same deduction occur to you?"

"It is possible you are right," replied Garth thickly. "I saw the body; but, of course, he was many years older; many years had elapsed."

"You were only a young boy when you saw him last, and it was most likely he had changed a great deal," said St John. "I do not think it negatives my idea that you did not recognise him. I have a conviction it was our father who met his tragic death almost at our door."

"Yes," said Stephen, surveying his brother thoughtfully, "it may have been so. But nothing will shake my belief in Vivian's innocence."

"I do not agree with you, Stephen."

"He was my friend," said Garth in a low tone.

CHAPTER XLIII

RACHEL'S WEDDING DRAWS NEAR

"I suppose Stephen and Marion are coming down for the wedding?" said Mrs Garth.

"I suppose so," replied Rachel.

"Marion does not mention it in her letter," added Mrs Garth. "She only says Stephen is so busy that she scarcely sees him. I thought perhaps they were paving the way for an excuse. Of course, he was away from his work a long while with poor little Bobbit and Colonel Carew, and probably they did wish to go away again so soon."

"I have no wish to interfere with Stephen's arrangements," said Rachel. "I can be married without him."

"But is he not to give you away?" questioned Mrs Garth. "I took it for granted!"

"If he comes he comes," said Rachel, "otherwise we can find somebody else to give me away. What does it matter? Weddings are dull affairs—scarcely less dismal than funerals. If I were Stephen I should not come."

"What a strange idea, Rachel!" Mrs Garth was plainly scandalised. "I do not know how it is you have acquired such an unconventional frame of mind. Of course, a brother—and such a good brother as Stephen—must desire to witness his sister's wedding."

Rachel bit off an end of cotton with vicious white teeth. She was trimming a hat. In a week's time she was to marry John Tregenna, and the burden of the future sat upon her shoulders like a nightmare. When she was alone she brooded or cried; with her mother and Mamie she was alternately sullen and gay. But it was only the sullenness which was natural.

She turned the hat about with deft hands. She was thinking of something else all the time, but the millinery progressed nevertheless.

"John is coming to dinner," she said presently; "did I tell you, mother?"

"You never mentioned it before," replied Mrs Garth. "You are too bad, Rachel! I would have ordered an extra dish——"

"Oh, it doesn't matter!" said Rachel; "what is good enough for us is good enough for him."

"You will live in a different manner when you are married," said Mrs Garth, with the pride which every woman, however good, seems to take in the daughter who is making a wealthy marriage.

"Yes," said Rachel; "we shall dine in the evening off seven or eight courses, and there will be a separate footman in livery to hand each dish! How happy I ought to be!"

"Of course, you hope to be happy with John or you would not have accepted him," observed Mrs Garth uneasily.

"Of course," said Rachel. "Oh, we shall be the happiest couple in England, no doubt! Do you like this bow here or there, mother?"

Mrs Garth looked at the girl's face, not at the hat.

"Are you quite *well*, Rachel?" she asked. "I am troubled about you; I have been for some time. You are so thin and pale."

"Do you mean that I am getting plain?" inquired Rachel, with the vivacity of sudden interest.

"You could never be that, my dear. Are you sure that—that you are happy? Sometimes I wonder if you really care for this man after all!"

"Pray don't wonder anything of the kind, mother!"

"Heaven knows you have chosen him of your own accord.

Nobody has forced you. I would not put pressure of that kind upon a daughter of mine if a millionaire were concerned. Money alone does not bring happiness. I am sure you are too sensible and nice-minded to think otherwise."

Rachel bent over her hat. Her lips were trembling mutinously, and she bit them before replying.

"I don't know what idea you have got into your head, mother. I certainly did not accept him because he was rich."

"It relieves me to hear you say so, Rachel."

"I have always recognised the fact that no amount of money could compensate *me* at anyrate for an uncongenial husband. But, having assured you I am not mercenary, mother, need we talk about it any more?"

Mrs Garth, who had risen, bent over the girl and kissed her on the brow.

"My dear daughter, my darling child," she said emotionally, "may your married life be as perfect as my heart desires for you!"

Rachel did not respond; there was a hysterical lump in her throat which she could scarcely gulp down.

Fortunately, her mother went away, and the mask dropped from the girl's face as the door closed. The hat was laid aside; she raised her head. Her lips were quivering, her eyes wild; even her cheeks were drawn by the anguish she was obliged to hide from those about her.

"Sometimes," she said to herself, "I think I shall go out of my mind."

She had reckoned upon "growing used" to Tregenna, but she could not arrive at that desirable state. She was not used to him. He filled her with as much disgust at the end of their long engagement as at the beginning. But she still intended to marry him. There was nothing else to do. She could not desert Stephen.

For ten minutes she sat staring blankly before her, the picture of despair. The girl's eyes seemed to have grown bigger and darker of late, probably because her face was thinner; her expression would have made the name of a tragic actress. In a week's time she was going to marry a man she loathed.

There is nothing in life so terrible even to the ordinary woman as that, and Rachel was by no means ordinary. She hated as she loved—with all the intensity of a passionate nature. She was fastidious, dainty, almost over-refined. And Tregenna had not only inspired her with horror by his brutal conduct towards her, and her suspicions of his treatment of Prudence; he was objectionable in himself, coarse, selfish, animal.

Her nostrils expanded and contracted with the deep breaths she drew; her bosom heaved, her fingers interlaced and locked like writhing snakes. So was her soul writhing, as though the blast of a furnace scorched it.

The garden gate clanged. It was Tregenna already.

The girl's eyes fixed themselves upon him with the gaze of a basilisk, and followed him up the path. She was behind the curtain and he did not see her, but he was gazing eagerly at the house—that eagerness of his, which sickened her! He was always early to come, and late to go. Nothing seemed to turn him away from his resolve; he was as obstinate in his passion as she was, unconsciously, in the sullen insistence of her sacrifice.

She did not stir to meet him. She let him come right into the room, and up to her before she moved. Why should she feign respect and welcome? That was not in the bargain. When anyone was present she acted; when they were alone, as it happened now, she would be no more than herself—a wild thing trapped, longing to bite, but afraid of the hand which held the whip.

He kissed her. He had brought her a diamond bracelet, and was ruddy with health and spirits. While she pined, he thrived. It always agreed with John Tregenna to get his own way.

"Aren't you going to give me a kiss for my diamonds?" he asked.

"No," said Rachel promptly. "You can take them back if you like!"

"Hullo," he said, "in a bad temper this morning, Miss Spitfire?"

Rachel picked up the hat and bent over it once more. Her lips pouted. She cut out the bow she had taken such pains to fashion, and spoilt the whole design. The uglier the thing looked

the better ; she would wear it the first time he took her out ! It was a girl's malice.

"I hope you are going to be more agreeable on the honeymoon," he added, "or people *will* think us a queer couple."

"I don't care what anybody thinks !"

"Don't you ?" he said. "Oh yes, you do ! Nobody cares more."

Rachel remained sulkily silent a full minute. She knew that his large rough hands were in his pockets, and his feet planted wide apart, and that he was staring at her, although she did not look up. She took a bitter pleasure in annoying him, and rarely allowed an opportunity of doing so to pass.

"You are a nice, amiable sweetheart for a man to have, aren't you ?" he said at last.

"I never pretended to be amiable. You know what I am."

"You make it so pleasant when I come here !"

"I'm glad you don't like it," said Rachel. "Why should I try to look happy while I am unhappy ?"

"Do you suppose I don't know why you're doing it ? You want to choke me off, but you can't succeed, my dear !"

"No ; you are too lacking in imagination," she said passionately, "to perceive that your own life will be as wretched as mine !"

The man drew nearer to her, and stood by her side.

"Perhaps I can see farther than you give me credit for," he replied, "and I am not quite such a fool as you think. At present you have the whip hand, to some extent. When we are married it will be different. I don't intend to be wretched. There will be none of this sort of talk after the first week. I'll soon teach you to be civil."

"How ? Will you beat me ?" she asked sarcastically.

"I'll manage you."

"You had better not brag yet awhile," she said. "I may change my mind still."

He laughed. He could do so without uneasiness. The girl who had been prevailed upon to accept him under such conditions was not likely to defy him now. Her spirit only amused him. The piquant contrast between her ill behaviour and the meek

and patient woman who had been his willing slave half her life, often converted his anger into tenderness. He put his arm round her now, and bent over her coaxingly.

"Come, don't be cross. Whatever I've said or done has only been said or done because I love you. That ought to make any woman forgive me."

"I should be ready enough to forgive everything if you would release me."

"Sooner ask me to cut my own throat, dear."

"Well, cut your throat, then!" she retorted.

He choked her with a rough caress instead.

"You never drop it, do you! Never mind, we shall get on better by-and-by, when you have realised it's no good making any more fuss. Don't you like the bracelet?"

"Yes; it is very pretty."

"Let's see it on your wrist, then. You might let that hat alone till I've gone."

She frowned at him, but obeyed. It frequently happened that persistence gave him his own way at last. She grew as impatient of opposing him as of doing anything else for more than ten minutes at a time, and there was the dogged force of a steam hammer about Tregenna.

"I've sent the furniture you don't like back to Green's," he said. "They aren't very pleased about it, but it's all the same to me: it ain't paid for. You can choose when we come back from the honeymoon."

"You needn't have bothered," she replied ungraciously. "I don't care what the house looks like. I should have told everybody it was your taste."

"You might as well have what you like," he said, refusing to resent her snub—"as you've got to live with it."

Yes, she had got to live with it! He scored, as he always scored. Her ragings were but the beating of the wings against the bars. He could always crush her with finger and thumb if he chose.

"Very well," she said, suffocating. "We'll buy what is necessary as we pass through London on our return. I like old furniture, not new; Green's is not the right sort of shop."

"I should have thought it best to have things fresh and clean myself," he said. "But I daresay you know best. . . . Have you heard from your brother Stephen lately?"

"He is working very hard as usual. I am afraid he will overdo it someday."

"Is he comin' to the wedding?"

"My mother was asking the same question just now. I don't know."

She caught him smiling, but if he had intended to say anything in disparagement of Stephen, Mamie's entrance obliged him to hold his tongue.

"I didn't know you were here," said the young girl, giving him her hand ungraciously. "I thought Rachel was alone."

She had a letter in her hand and Rachel glanced at it.

"Do you want to speak to me?"

"It doesn't matter." Mamie made a movement to retreat.

"You needn't go away, Mamie," said Rachel hastily. "We are not talking secrets."

But Mamie, who could not be expected to know how her sister objected to a *tête-à-tête* with the man she was going to marry next week, murmured something unintelligible, and retired. She could not stand John Tregenna just now. She was in a rollicking mood, and longed to shout, and Rachel's fiancé was always like a wet blanket to her.

It still wanted half-an-hour to dinner-time. Mamie went out of doors as a matter of course. Dame Nature was a second mother to the girl—a mother who was always sympathetic with her moods. The smell of the earth, damp after rain, the glistening of the raindrops on the lawn, the gay chirp of the birds, went to her head like wine. A white cloud drifting across the sky gave her a restless desire for motion. She ascended the hill whence she could see the ships go by, and perched on a fence, hugging her letter. Her eyes, following the trail of an outward-bound steamer, grew brighter and brighter, her lips parted. Her intent gaze at the ocean and its traffic was the first flapping of the young wings eager for flight from the nest.

By-and-by she read the letter again. It contained a proposal of marriage from Adolphus Wetherby. His uncle had helped

him to start a farm of his own. There was a good house on it, and every prospect of a growing income.

"It is lonely, that is the only drawback," wrote Adolphus, "and would still be lonely, if I had a whole township here, without you. Will you come? I may never be a rich man, but I can give you a comfortable home, and a horse to ride and drive, and I think we might have a real good time together if you love me as I love you. I reckon to have put by enough in six months to refurnish the bungalow, and still have sufficient over to meet you at Sidney, and have a fortnight's holiday before we went home. We could be married the day you arrived. Oh, Mamie, darling Mamie, will you?"

The girl sat musing, with her eyes on the sea.

CHAPTER XLIV

"WHEN YOU RETURN"

"STEPHEN, you haven't forgotten the date?"

"What do you mean?"

"I only wish to remind you that Rachel's marriage is drawing near."

Husband and wife were alone, and the man's features contracted sharply.

"I have not forgotten. The marriage will not take place."

Marion drew a quick breath. Her face lightened.

"You have made up your mind to stop it?" she asked.

"Really? Oh, why did you not tell me before!"

"I thought that you would credit me with a little affection for my sister."

She gazed at him incredulously, almost afraid to rejoice. Was it possible the great step was to be taken so suddenly and quietly after all? He puzzled her with his calmness, his reticence. Why did he not ask her for the sympathy she was longing to bestow on him—the sympathy he had craved so long in vain?

"Then you are going to Carnruan?" she asked hesitatingly.

"Yes; on Saturday. I cannot get away before."

"I will accompany you."

"I must return on Sunday night. It will be very tiring for you, Marion."

"I do not mind that. I wish to go with you, to stand by your side."

He flushed deeply. There was a light in her eyes which he had not seen there for months, for years. He took her hand and kissed it, and she did not repulse him. It was through a mist that he saw the wedding ring he had given her, and the cluster of diamonds guarding it—the first token of his love.

"Oh, Marion, you are a good woman," he said in a low tone. "I—I thank you, my dear."

If he had sought her lips she would have yielded them. But he turned away, almost as though he were afraid of her and the weakness her emotion had aroused in him, and she stood musing agitatedly, her eyes full of tears.

On Saturday morning they went down to Carnruan together. St John and Constance had invited them to the Vicarage for the wedding, but for sundry reasons they preferred to go to Poldinnick, half dismantled as it was.

A weight seemed to settle on Marion's breast as they drove up the hill and stopped at the door. It was a grey day. A mist wrapped the hills as in a shroud, and all the troubles of her life crowded like ghosts around her. Vivian, with reproachful eyes, lurked in the great stone porch to greet her; she could hear Bobbit crying upstairs; once more she saw her uncle's figure stiff on his couch of death.

Garth stretched out his hand to help her down, but she disregarded his aid, and he found her gazing at him with an indefinable expression. It was one of those moments, not infrequent, when she asked herself if her staunchness to him had not been a crime as great as his own, instead of a wife's fidelity.

But she conquered the temporary repugnance with which he had inspired her. She had accompanied him to Carnruan to encourage, not to dishearten him. He had promised to prevent Rachel's marriage. How could he do so save by the confession for which she prayed night and morning?

They had scarcely spoken all the way down in the train. He

had been absorbed in his own reflections, from which she had not attempted to arouse him, and they were as silent as they entered the house. Although it had only been untenanted for a short while it struck chill, or Marion fancied so. The arches and pillars of the old Norman hall, which she used to love, reminded her of a crypt; the great, empty fireplace yawned drearily, and their footsteps on the carpetless stone floor aroused an echo which heightened the loneliness of the place.

The housekeeper showed her up to the old room of her girlhood, which she had occupied on her later visits to Poldinnick, and she heard her husband pace along the corridor on the way to his own bedroom.

She tried to overcome her depression. It was foolish after all to be affected by surroundings. They were here for a purpose which should fill her with relief and joy. If he remained staunch to his resolution the whole current of their lives would be changed. But she could not believe even now that he really meant to speak, that the silence, which had tortured her and kept their souls apart was really to end at last. The solitude of this mansion peopled by ghosts heightened that sense of unreality which sometimes relieves a mind strained to the utmost limits of endurance. The rows of grim, shut doors, the stark outlines of the furniture under holland covers and dusting sheets, only accentuated the strangeness of what had been familiar once.

Although it was summer the housekeeper had had a fire lighted in the morning-room, where tea was served. The blaze was cheerful, and Marion warmed her hands at it until Garth came down. He still wore his overcoat, and brought his cap with him.

"Are you going to your mother's?"

"No; to St Ruth. I must get that over at once."

"You will have a cup of tea first?"

He took the cup from her hand. He had looked weary in the train; he looked energetic now. She flushed, and her heart beat faster. She began to feel that he meant to keep his word.

If he did, if he did! It was an ordeal which was before him. She was willing enough to admit that. The man who had the strength to carry out his task would be worthy of respect after

all. How she wished she could help him! But he did not even discuss his plan of action with her. She did not know whether he intended to make a public confession, or merely to defy Tregenna and leave him to do his worst.

For once the reserve which usually existed between them seemed unnatural and unnecessary. She longed to draw closer to him at this hour, to strengthen him with her sympathy. But he made no appeal.

"You will come straight back, will you not?" she asked presently, with a deep liquid note in her voice. "I shall not go out till you return. Of course, I am very anxious."

"You need not be anxious. I have promised you the girl shall not be sacrificed."

"Stephen," she murmured.

"Oh, Marion!"

He caught at the hand she extended to him with a gasp of gratitude.

"Never forget," she said, "that I love you still."

"You love me—after all?"

"Yes—yes! I have lost faith in you; my hopes have often been trampled underfoot; but if you will do this thing. . . . Oh, how I have prayed and prayed that you might be moved to atone!"

"I thought," he said, "it was only your conscience and your affection for Vivian which kept your interest in me alive."

"You are wrong. I have cared for you all through, far more than you have cared for me—or you would have sought a reconciliation long ago."

"Have I not made advances to you innumerable times?"

"Ah, but advances of the wrong kind," she replied sadly.

"You knew what made the barrier between us, and you would not remove it."

"Was it so high, so wide, that you could not step over it? Some women would not have known that it was there!"

"What sort of women, Stephen?"

"Not like you! No—no! I deserve the rebuke. You are good; nothing can tarnish the pure gold of a nature such as yours! I don't reproach you, God knows, although you have

caused me as much pain as I have cost you. You look at things from the point of view natural to you; could I help it that it was equally my nature to take an opposite stand? We have been unfortunate. But perhaps it will come right after all. There have been times," he added, "when your coldness would have driven me to suicide if I had been a weaker man."

"Don't say that!" she cried poignantly. "That is the cruellest reproach you could conceive. I did not mean that! I would not have such an awful thing happen for anything on earth! I was only trying to spur your conscience. If I could have done more with tenderness and entreaty I would never have ceased imploring you to take this step. . . ."

She stopped. He regarded her with a conflict of emotions in his eyes.

"Ah, Marion," he said brokenly, "your softened voice melts my heart! What might you not accomplish with your lips! He bent towards her, at the same time drawing her nearer to him. "I have starved. Kiss me!"

She threw her head back.

"Not yet! When you return."

"I may never return! I may die on the way. A thunderbolt may fall from heaven on my head! Who knows, in this world of ours, what may not happen in an hour or two? Let me kiss you."

"When you return," she repeated.

He released her with a movement of anger.

"The Sphinx has more passion, less self-control, than you! You speak of love, but you do not know the meaning of the word. Do you think that any sin—any crime of yours—could have made me forsake you as you forsook me?"

"Go!" she said, pushing him by the shoulders with two white hands as fierce and strenuous as flame. "Go, and come again, and you shall see! You think me cold because I have lived a life during the last three years which would have driven most women mad! Do you imagine that yours has been the only longing? How little do men know women! You, who married me, and were my twin soul once, is it possible you do not understand? My self-denial cost me tears of blood. I have wept

when you did not see, and kissed the things your hand had touched, and lain like a wounded dog outside your door! How many times have I not been on the point of surrendering everything to you, of owning you my master for good and evil, of selling my soul for your love? But God gave me the strength to drive the dagger into my own breast day after day, and bear the agony of it, to resist my own passion, to persevere, to wait with prayer for you to come to me. And you are coming, are you not, Stephen? You are coming back to me!"

He was white to the lips. He resisted her urging hands. His arm caught her by the shoulders, and drew her to his breast.

"Kiss me now, Marion!"

"I will not!" she cried. "I swore it, and I will not. Go, and God be with you!"

As he turned to the door, his features contracted by indescribable emotions, she dropped on her knees and prayed.

CHAPTER XLV

GARTH AND TREGENNA MEET

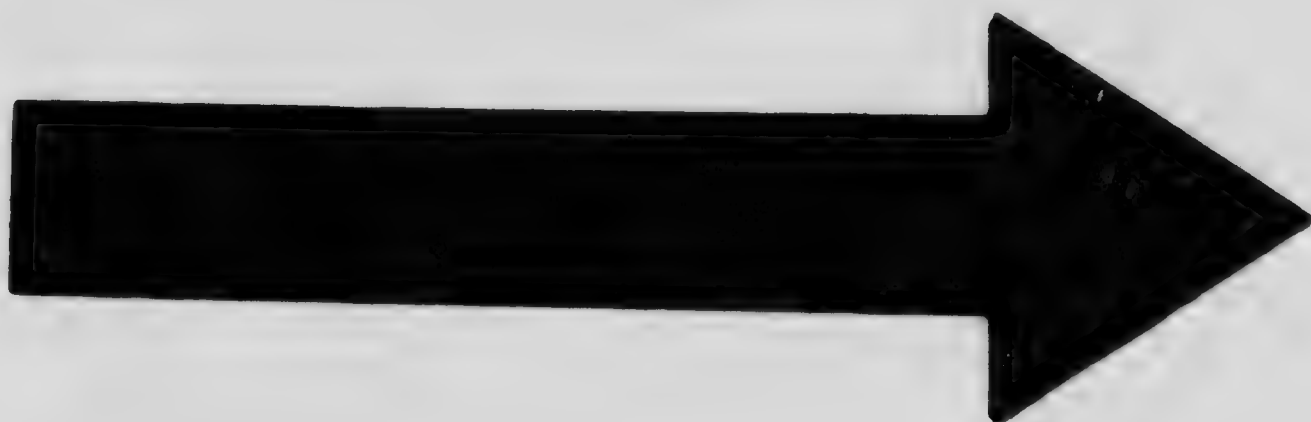
As Garth left Poldinnick to walk to St Ruth a small, dapper gentleman, with a little black bag, rang the bell of Tregenna's house. He was expected, and ushered at once into the robust, masterful presence of the mine owner himself.

Tregenna, no less indefatigable than of old now that he had a beautiful young wife in prospect to work for, had but just returned from the "Talk o' the Vale," where he was getting things ship-shape, and drilling subordinates to take his place during his absence on the honeymoon. With his broad shoulders at ease in an old coat, and a pipe between his teeth, he greeted Mr Honeybun the lawyer, whom he had summoned from Craddoc in order to economise his own more valuable time.

"You've got the deed of settlement ready?" he inquired.

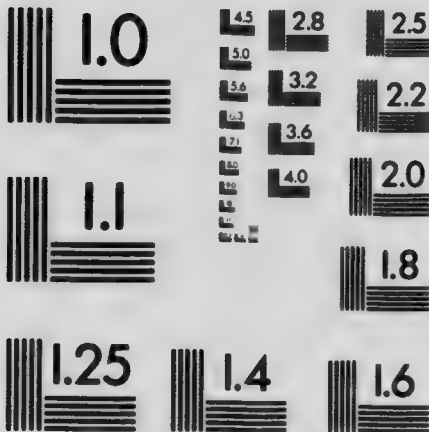
"Yes, Mr Tregenna. It only awaits your signature. Shall I read it to you?"

"Thanks; I'll read it myself," said Tregenna in his cautious Cornish way.



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Mr Honeybun opened the black bag, which immediately vomited documents, and, selecting one, handed it to Tregenna, who perused it thoroughly from beginning to end.

It was a generous marriage settlement which he proposed to bestow upon Rachel, nobody could deny that. Whatever happened to him she would be provided for, and her children, if there were any children of the marriage, after her.

The man who had risen from the soil to opulence stretched his legs and drove his big hands deep into his trouser pockets, and sat musing agreeably enough after the lawyer had gone. He did not allow himself to be troubled about Vivian Carew. His conscience was not one of those tender ones which suffer from acute analysis and the stings of self-reproach. It was not he who had victimised Vivian, and he did not feel called upon to interfere when it was more to his own interest to hold his tongue. In six days Rachel was to become his wife, and the fancies of her girlhood would have to be relegated to the past. When once they were married he would have no real fear of anybody. He considered himself thoroughly capable of taking care of his wife. It was only the suspense accompanying anticipation which made him fidget sometimes, and walk about the room when he should have been engaged with figures or letters. He was so anxious for the bonds to be tied that he wished every intervening hour away. He did not see how anything could happen to balk him; but one never knows. There had been one postponement already on account of little Bobbit's death. Somebody else might die, and he could not utterly defy convention, as he proposed to take up the position of a landed proprietor. The girl herself might fall ill, or he might meet with an accident. It brought him out in a perspiration to think of such things. Semi-consciously he had been taking a great deal of care of himself lately. He used to have no nerves, but as his wedding day approached he had become cautious in his actions at the mine, sceptical about the temper of horses, unusually fearful of wet feet. When a man desires anything as much as Tregenna desired Rachel he begins to suspect all the forces of nature of conspiring to despoil him. It would be a great relief when they were actually married and there was no more chance of a slip between the cup and the lip.

His hand trembled as he refilled his pipe. She was so lovely, so dainty, so attractive in every way. None of the girl's tempers disillusioned him. Sometimes he bore with her patiently, sometimes he was angry, but the spell of her beauty held him as in a vice. And it was not only her beauty which charmed him. There was a subtle magnetism about her. Her vivacity of expression, her movements, her tricks of manner, were utterly different from those of any other woman, or he fancied so. He had never been really in love since the calf period when he married Prudence. It was a state as painful to him as it was sweet. He was not really happy. His conquest was a conquest of arms, and her resentment and disinclination kept him in a perpetual fever.

He rose presently, and looked out of the window at the small front garden with the tiled path — quite suburban — which Prudence had kept so primly, and the road leading to the irregular, rather squalid cottages of the mining village. He had had the same view, or one just like it, out of his window for years, but this was his last week at St Ruth. In the future velvet lawns, and the spreading oaks and stately elms of his new estate, would surround him. It would be like beginning life again on another social plane when he returned from the honeymoon with Rachel. The new mistress of his home would be as different from Prudence as the mansion itself was different from the four-roomed cottage of his former early married life. He had gone up in the world; there was no mistake about it. Most people would have considered he had reason to be proud, boastful, domineering, and scornful of less successful men.

As he turned away the figure of a gentleman advanced briskly along the road from the direction of Carnruan.

A moment later Tregenna's parlour-maid opened the dining-room door.

"Dr Garth, sir."

Garth followed her into the room, and Tregenna rose.

"Hullo!" he said. "I didn't know you were expected down so soon. How are you?"

They shook hands in the fashion of men who do not care for

each other. Tregenna had nothing against Garth — on the contrary ; but Garth's frigid manner was repellent.

"Neither did my people expect me so soon," he replied.

"Well, I'm glad to see you anyhow," said Tregenna, with an attempt at cordiality. "I've just had my lawyer here about the marriage settlements. I daresay you'd like to see how I am providing for Rachel?"

It had occurred to him, indeed, that this was the reason of Dr Garth's visit. But Garth merely cast an indifferent glance at the papers proffered for his inspection, and stood erect by the table.

"I do not doubt the generosity of your intentions towards my sister," he said, "but they will not be put to the test. I have come to tell you that you cannot marry her."

"I cannot marry her!" repeated Tregenna. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly what I say, Mr Tregenna."

Tregenna's florid complexion became inflamed, his nostrils contracted, his hands clenched.

"May I ask if she sent you?"

"No. I come entirely of my own accord."

"Then is your interference necessary?" asked Tregenna. "I suppose the girl knows her own mind!"

Garth paused. It was as though he had reached the brink of an abyss, and was hesitating to take the frightful leap to which a woman's pleading voice urged him. Social destruction awaited him at the bottom. He would be crushed ; he would never rise again. But she would fall with him, and her arms would harbour the wounded flesh and blood which were sacrificed to his soul.

Ever afterwards he remembered that room and everything in it—the crimson flock wall-paper, the gaudy patterns of carpet and table-cloth, the gilt-framed oleographs which had been poor Prudence's delight. A careless servant had scratched the tragic countenance of "Judith" with the edge of a feather broom, and a jagged line revealed the white paper beneath.

He had never been in Tregenna's house before, and at another time he would have been amused by these eccentricities of taste.

But his sense of humour was dead for the moment. Judith of the scratched face, the "Black Brunswicker" taking farewell of his love, and the "lustres" on the mantelshelf, were tragic in their association with a crisis in his life.

Tregenna gave a hoarse laugh, moved to the mirth which was to be expected of his kind. He was not anxious yet, only enraged.

"It seems to me," he added, "that you are coming forward rather late in the day. You'd have done better to keep quiet altogether, Dr Garth. I don't want words with you, and you'd do well to avoid words with me. The marriage is between her and me, and I don't listen to what anybody else's got to say on a subject which don't concern 'em."

"When I speak most men listen," said Garth, "and you will not be the exception, I am sure."

"It depends on what you've got to say," replied Tregenna roughly. "If it's about breaking off the marriage I tell you beforehand you can save your breath. She gave me her Yes, and your No don't affect the matter."

The slate clock struck. Tregenna had paid more for it on account of the chimes. Garth counted the strokes as though he could not make up his mind before they were done.

"It isn't as though she were seventeen," resumed Tregenna in an argumentative tone, which did some credit to his self-control. "She's old enough to know her own mind and choose for herself."

None of the emotions which beset Garth were visible on his face. He only stood like a sphinx thinking. All the way along the road he had been thinking, but decision had been left, as usual in such cases, to the final moment and its impulse after all.

His eyes suddenly met Tregenna's with stern and unfaltering gaze.

"It has reached my ears," he said, "that my sister was yielding to threats when she accepted your proposal of marriage. You threatened her, in fact, with the exposure of some discreditable secret concerning my past."

"She has told you, then?" said Tregenna intently. "I didn't think she had."

"She was induced to confide in my wife," replied Garth, "who repeated the story to me. It is obvious the girl does not care for you or wish to marry you. I can only regret that her folly, as great as her sisterly devotion, has caused her so much needless unhappiness, and that I did not know what was going on before."

"You take a high hand," said Tregenna roughly. "What's your game? If you'd consulted her before coming here she would have told you I was not a man to be played with. She's given me her promise, and she'll have to keep it."

"You wrung it from her by unfair means," said Garth. "If I wanted to have a quarrel with you I could describe your conduct in more forcible terms. This decision is final. As I have an objection to disturbances I trust you will accept it quietly."

If Tregenna's countenance had been purple before, it became livid now. It was only by the greatest efforts that he kept his hands off the other man's throat.

"Oh, you trust I shall accept it quietly, do you! Of all the damned cheek! I'm not so soft; I'm not such a fool. She knows the price of my silence, and it's got to be paid. Unless the wedding takes place as arranged I shall go to the police and tell them what really happened that night at the Rocking Stone!"

Garth did not defend himself. They were alone, and nothing was to be gained by denying what the other man had evidently seen with his own eyes. His mood was a different one. He chose to take another tone, and he smiled in Tregenna's face, his own white, but calm.

"I should not advise you to do anything so rash," he said. "Do you know that you are an accessory after the fact, and liable to a long term of imprisonment for not speaking before?"

It was obvious that Tregenna had not thought of it. He was almost ridiculously disconcerted. His jaw dropped; he stared at his adversary aghast. He soon pulled himself together, however.

"It might be imprisonment for me, but it would be hanging for you!" he retorted brutally.

"You are mistaken," said Garth. "There is no question of hanging in the matter. If you really saw what happened you would know that the man was drunk and fell over the cliff without any assistance from me."

"That's your story," said Tregenna, with a hoarse laugh. "Mine might be different."

"Then it would be untrue. My only crime is towards Vivian Carew. I was sorry for him at the time, I am sorry for him now, but I did not see my way, for sundry reasons, to take the onus of what happened upon myself. I might have been misjudged, and I could not afford to be misjudged."

"What your motives were has got nothing to do with me as long as I have Rachel. Let the girl keep her word, and you needn't fear my tongue. But I'm not going to keep your secret for nothing; you can't expect it. You're playing for your own hand, and I'm playing for mine. You know my terms. You can take 'em or leave 'em."

Garth smiled again.

"I must wish you good-afternoon, Mr Tregenna. My wife will be waiting dinner for me."

"I'll make the country too damned hot to hold you," said Tregenna, hoarse with rage.

"On reflection," replied Garth smoothly, "I am sure you will be more sensible. The word of a man who extracts a promise of marriage from a girl during his wife's lifetime, and obtains his freedom so conveniently soon after, is apt to be regarded with suspicion. I leave you in the trust that you will inform Rachel that she is released from her promise. Good-afternoon to you."

The doctor removed his steady gaze, and turned to the door. His diminishing footsteps were audible in the hall. The front door closed, also the gate, and he walked down the road as leisurely as he had walked up it.

Tregenna, who had made no effort to stop him, sank trembling into a chair. His face was wet, and he smeared it with his hand. The man, big and powerful as an ox, was cowed. Mind had conquered matter.

When Garth was out of sight of the house his pace quickened.

He too was agitated. He had gone through fire, and showed it. His face was as colourless as paper; he breathed quickly and deeply with inflated nostrils; his lips twitched. He had tried an experiment upon Tregenna; he had attempted to bully the bully, and had probably succeeded; but what would success mean? It would save Rachel from a detested marriage, which was much, but what about himself and Marion?

Marion had misunderstood his intentions, one-ideal as she was. It had been no part of his original plan to confess. The possibility had entered his head of protecting his sister at no greater cost to himself than a disagreeable half-hour. But Marion's emotion, the passion she had betrayed, her unexpected appeal in the name of their mutual love, had elevated him momentarily to the stool of penitence on which she would see him stand. She had stirred him, she had fired his blood; the appeal of her beauty, never dead, had reached its climax when she gave him her hand but withheld her lips. All that was worth striving for, living for, had seemed concentrated at that moment in the person of his wife, and he had left her in a fever of longing, blind to every other desire save that of regaining the place in her life which he had forfeited by his crime. It had seemed worth while to give up everything for her. He had even wondered at his own obduracy, marvelled that he could have withstood her so long. It was cold, this isolation upon the summit of success. What man who was a man could be content with fame alone? He hungered for the woman's love and sympathy. To kneel beside her, and rest his head in her lap once more, would be an idyl which was worth any price.

But the road to St Ruth was long, and his temper had cooled by the way. The world was not Eden; life was more complicated now than when man and woman had only to decide the question of whether to eat or not to eat. The innumerable consequences of his confession had reasserted their true magnitude; once more he had realised what he would be paying for his wife's pardon.

It was not that he begrudged the price or thought the reward incommensurate; it was impossible—impossible to do what she asked. His disappearance from the ranks of his profession

would leave too large a gap. The new hospital, if nothing else, made an irrefutable claim upon him; whichever way he looked he saw how much he was needed, how many places he filled. In the beginning he might have been spared less than now. The shoot might have withered unnoticed; the full-grown tree with its roots deep in the soil, its branches spreading far and near, would destroy a multitude in its fall. So his brief exaltation had died, and he had only met Tregenna with artifice. What would Marion say?

He sighed heavily. She would be very disappointed. He could imagine how her face would change when he told her he had no intention of confessing after all. She had been so human this afternoon. It was as though a mask had dropped, and revealed her true face as he had known it once. What a pity for both of them that she could not continue in her illusion!

His dull eyes fired; a little flush came into his cheeks. Suppose he allowed her to cherish her self-deception for a few days more, even a few hours? She loved him still, and he loved her. It would be sweet to receive her caresses once more, to claim the kisses she no longer denied him. His own thoughts made him feel a scoundrel, and he dismissed them with a sigh. If she need not know the truth to-night she must know it to-morrow, and she would hate him for ever—as he would hate himself for having deceived her.

CHAPTER XLVI

SUSPENSE

At Poldinnick Marion was awaiting his return in a state of suspense which was happiness compared with her former hopelessness. It did not even enter her head that he intended to outwit Tregenna rather than take the only straightforward course. At last she really believed that the barrier which had existed between them so long was to be overthrown. If only his courage did not fail him at the last moment!

She prayed passionately that he might not turn back. Rachel

rescued, and the wrong he had done Vivian repaired, there was no reason why she might not yield him her love once more. Her conscience would no longer reproach her for the condonation of a crime, because the crime itself would have ceased to exist.

With beating heart she paced the shrouded room. Its dreariness no longer oppressed her. All her senses were absorbed in expectation, her ears strained, her eyes sought the window continually. Not even as a girl awaiting her lover had she longed so intensely for the sight of his face, the sound of his voice.

Besides the relief of his atonement there would be the joy of feeling that she had helped him. Her patience and perseverance would meet with their reward. Through her intervention would have come this glorious day of repentance.

Her heart seemed melting in religious fervour and love of a man. He had sinned, but he had suffered for it, and confession at this time of day would surely prove his grit and innate worth. At the worst the man was a man, all his actions were great, for good or evil. His soul had been worth fighting for; his redemption would surely please God more than the hesitating ups and downs, the sins of self-indulgence, of the man who had neither the strength to be good nor bad.

She allowed her thoughts to wander far afield. What would be the material result of his confession she did not know. Vivian's name would be cleared, of course, and he would be able to take possession of the property she was preserving for him, and return to his rightful position in society. Her imagination could follow her husband no farther than the reconciliation which would give them both an interlude of pure joy and peace at last before the drama of their lives moved on. Once more a young girl's blushes flooded her cheeks, and she thrilled with the delights of love. He should have his full reward. She, who had bidden him do this thing, would stand by him with unfaltering devotion throughout the consequences, whatever they might be. If he were exiled by the world's opinion she would depart with him hand in hand; if he were vilified she would defend him with her greatest eloquence; if the worst happened, and he were put on his trial to answer for his father's life, she would only exist in expectation of his deliverance. But she

would not believe that his story could be doubted, that public opinion could be harsh to him who had done so much. They would let him go free, and together they would begin life again in another land.

She was so young after all, a girl despite the many sorrows she had endured, and he was a young man. In twenty years' time they would still be in the full enjoyment of life, and this time of sin and anguish would have faded into distance like a dream. Perhaps other children would be around them, to remind them tenderly of the baby they had lost—children, happier than poor Bobbit, who had been born to a household united in love and sympathy.

He seemed to be gone a long time. She had already calculated that the walk to St Ruth and back should take him not more than an hour and a half. She hoped they would not quarrel.

The pang with which she greeted the idea told her how she valued every hair of Stephen's head. If they quarrelled! The Cornishman was big and brutal, and, although Stephen was well enough able to take care of himself, one never knows the result of an unlucky blow.

She paced up and down, growing feverish. Every other minute she looked at her watch. He was half-an-hour overdue. Surely something dreadful had happened! Horrible visions tortured her eye of a message from St Ruth to say there had been an accident. Alternately she wondered if his courage had failed him and he was loath to return and tell her so.

The suspense was agonising. She was about to put on her hat, and walk down the hill to meet him, when he appeared at last.

He was walking quickly, and her spirits rose. She fancied self-respect and assurance in his gait. His eyes were already on the window at which she stood.

"He has done well," she thought. "He is not afraid!"

She had meant to meet him on the doorstep, but a strange weakness assailed her limbs suddenly. All she could do was to beckon to him and open the window.

He hesitated for a moment on the threshold. The expression

of her face—eager, tremulously alight—caught him by the throat like the grip of death.

"I have seen Tregenna," he said huskily.

"Yes—yes—yes!"

"I do not know what the result will be. I told him there would be no wedding, and he—does not love me. We shall see to-morrow."

"Ah—to-morrow," she sighed.

"Perhaps the police will come for me," he added grimly, "but——"

"But—what, Stephen?"

"We shall see," he repeated, "to-morrow."

She only found one meaning in his words, and she went to him with a sob of gratitude, and clasped him round the neck.

"Thanks be to God!" she cried. "The hour I have prayed for has come. You are restored to me! O my husband!"

He longed to respond, but dared not. The path of his transgression stopped at accepting the pardon he did not deserve. She touched him—she touched him to the heart which he had been trying to harden for three years.

He embraced her closely, with a passion in which she would have detected hopelessness if her suspicions had been aroused. Then he put her from him. It was a gesture of renunciation, of the man who has chosen once more between his theories of life—his ambition, his career—and a woman's love.

"Wait till to-morrow, Marion," he said gently. "You will understand."

CHAPTER XLVII

TREGENNA'S MESSAGE

GARTH would not tell his wife exactly what had taken place at his interview with Tregenna. He only repeated, in answer to her questions, his injunction to wait till to-morrow. He had admitted his connection with Joe Williams' death, that she knew, and supposed he was waiting for Tregenna to betray him.

Still, there was something in his manner which she could not understand; an unnatural reserve, a tension which even the anticipation of a hostile attack did not quite justify. All the evening she hovered round him anxiously. Her fondness, her softness after their long alienation, wrung his heart with the craving to accept the love she offered him. If only to-night could have lasted for ever, and there need be no to-morrow! But her enlightenment was as inevitable as the dawn. So soon she would know how he had failed her; so soon she would know that even her proffered pardon had not been compensation enough for the loss of the position he had won.

He did not kiss her when they said good-night, and she went to her bed soberly, musing. Doubts beset her thick and fast, making her sore heart ache once more. He had left her with passion to seek Tregenna, he had returned strangely silent and aloof. Yes, there was something wrong. She would discover it to-morrow.

That night was only one of many rendered sleepless by grief for him, and her stiff eyes remained wide open as hour after hour dragged its length away. Why had he not told her anything? She waited for the dawn, impatient, yet afraid. It was so long coming, but when it came she feared it, and would have put time back an hour or two.

At breakfast his first words were of The Haven.

"My people will be wondering why they have not seen us."

"Perhaps they do not know we have arrived."

"I hope they don't," he said. "I do not want to see anyone until one knows what Tregenna is doing. Something may happen this morning."

But a visit from St John after church was the only event before lunch.

"Mr Pennyquick told Rachel he had seen you," said the young vicar. "Why did you not forewarn us of your arrival? What mysterious people you are!"

"I did not know till the last moment that I should be able to get away," said Stephen. "We intended to surprise you this afternoon."

"But you were out yesterday," said St John. "Why didn't you come in to me?"

"It seems to me the village has been very busily reporting my movements!" said Garth, with the irritability of overwrought nerves. "I went to see Tregenna on business, as a matter of fact. It was for that purpose I came down so long before the wedding."

"You wanted to see Tregenna on business?" repeated St John. "Oh, about Rachel, I suppose. That was practical of you. Here was I on the spot, and never thought of it! My dear fellow, why didn't you remind me? I might have saved your valuable time."

It was evident the young vicar was alluding to the marriage settlements, concerning which Tregenna had dropped sundry hints of late, and Stephen maintained a silence which did not deceive him.

"Of course," added St John, with an air of worldly wisdom, "it is quite right that a man should make suitable provision for the girl he is going to marry—if he is able to do so—although I hate pounds, shillings, and pence to be associated with the holy sacrament of marriage."

Marion, who was present, waited in a state of tension for some remark on her husband's part which should prepare his brother for the truth. But Stephen, instead of seizing the opportunity presented to him, changed the subject abruptly.

"How is Constance?" he asked. "I met the Bishop in Bond Street the other day. He bade me give his love to her when we met."

"He is a splendid old chap," said St John, in a glow of enthusiasm. "I shall never forget what I owe him."

"You would be ungrateful if you did," said Garth. "I hope he will never regret his connection with our family."

Marion rose and left the room. Her husband's dry, level tone had reminded her painfully of how the consequences of his sin might overshadow other lives which were innocent, bringing sorrow and shame upon them. She seemed to see with his eyes at this moment as she had never seen before, to feel what he felt as he uttered those quiet words, poignant to himself and her

alone, to realise some of the many obstacles to confession which encompassed him. And although she did not withdraw a step from her own standpoint she found it easier to comprehend his, if not to sympathise with it.

St John had a round of parochial visits to pay, and soon left. Marion rejoined her husband.

"Ought we not to go and see your mother?" she asked. "They will think it so strange."

He assented, although he was loath to leave the house until Tregenna made some sign. If there were to be a scene he did not wish it to happen at his mother's.

They were on the point of departing when they caught sight of Rachel hastening up the drive. She reached them breathless.

"I ran all the way from home!" she cried. "O Stephen, O Marion, I am so happy!"

She threw herself into Marion's arms, sobbing.

"What has happened?" asked Marion tensely, clasping her close.

"I have just received a telegram from John Tregenna. Read it. This is your doing, I am sure."

Garth took it from her hand, his own hand trembling, and read aloud: "I release you from your promise.—John Tregenna."

He expelled a deep breath softly. Tregenna had thrown up the game. Rachel was free. He had won!

The lines which anxiety had drawn on his forehead were smoothed away. He had not only saved Rachel from a loveless marriage, but he had achieved a victory without paying for it.

The triumph of mind was exhilarating. With so much in his favour Tregenna, who represented brute force, had succumbed to intellect, and admitted himself beaten.

"I have cowed this man with words, mere words," thought Garth, "and changed the whole current of his life!"

Yes, it was an achievement, and his thoughts passed naturally from that to the contemplation of another conquest. If he had really talked the man into submission, why should he not be equally successful with a woman, with Marion? She loved him. At this moment it seemed to him he had been too easily repulsed and subdued. He should have persisted instead of yielding to

her dictation; he should have overwhelmed her with his protestations and appeals. She had placed a weapon in his hand when she told him the story of her own weakness and temptation. Could the woman who confessed to having cried outside his door withstand such an appeal as he felt himself capable of making to her to-day? This victory over Tregenna had put new energy into him. He felt as though only a powerful effort were required to make his life a success after all.

"I should have gone out of my mind," sobbed the girl, hysterical with relief. "Even you don't know how I detest that man."

"Thank God, you need think of him no more," replied Marion fervently.

"I cannot express my gratitude to you, Marion. You have been a true sister to me."

"It is not I whom you must thank, but Stephen," replied Marion in a strained tone.

"Stephen!" Rachel raised her head from Marion's shoulder, and turned her wet eyes on her brother with a curious expression, and it struck Garth that until this moment she had scarcely looked at him, that the tale of her joy, like the tale of her woe, had been poured into Marion's ears, not his. It made him feel, despite his relationship to both these women, that he was the stranger here—the stranger whose motives and actions were incomprehensible to them—whose mind they could not understand. "Then—then he knows?" she whispered.

"Yes; I thought it best to tell him. And I was right, you see!"

"O Marion! O Stephen!"

Rachel hid her face once more, as though she were ashamed to meet Stephen's eyes any longer—ashamed for him.

Marion drew a deep, sobbing breath and clasped the girl closer.

"Come indoors, dearest."

"You were going out, Marion, and I am keeping you."

"We are in no hurry," replied Marion. "We were on our way to see you, as a matter of fact."

The women re-entered the house with linked arms, and Garth followed them.

"I cannot think how Stephen managed it," said Rachel in a low tone.

He answered for himself.

"Do not trouble yourself about that. I think I am safe in promising that Tregenna will not persecute you again." He approached her, deeply embarrassed, and rested his hands on her shoulders. "I must thank you, Rachel, for your generosity, your affection, your devotion. You are a brave and noble girl. I only regret, with all my heart, that you should have suffered such prolonged mental distress for my sake."

Rachel coloured, and her lips quivered. It was a difficult position for both of them.

"I—I did my best," she faltered. "I meant that you should never know."

"It was heroic," he responded, "and I shall never forget it. I am afraid I must have lost your good opinion, Rachel. Marion has told you everything, has she not?"

"Everything."

"That Vivian Carew was the man who has borne the blame, makes your loyalty to me still more touching and distressing," he said. "My poor sister!"

She burst into a storm of wild weeping in his arms.

Marion's bosom laboured in sympathy. She was worked up to a state of emotion only second to Rachel's, but she had more self-control.

"Why don't you tell her," she whispered, "that everything will be put right soon?"

"We will speak about that afterwards," he replied huskily.

She gave him a strange searching look, and took Rachel gently from him.

"Come to me," she murmured in her beautiful voice, which was liquid with unshed tears. "Talk to me! Weep—oh, my darling! weep with me."

Garth drew apart once more. As soon as he and Marion were alone she would ask him what Tregenna's conduct meant, and he would have to tell her how he had defended Rachel. Already she suspected something; he saw that. Her manner showed it as, in response to his unsatisfactory answer to her question, she

took the girl with that jealous, protective instinct from his arms. He was an alien who was not expected to share the mingled joy and grief which he had caused. He had saved Rachel, but what of the man she loved?

It was the girl who talked the most. Her voice reached him dimly where he stood at the window buried in thought. She was between smiles and tears, half hysterical with the unexpected relief. Marion listened with tender sympathy, but her eyes every now and then wandered over Rachel's shoulder to Stephen.

Yes, the moment of explanation was at hand. Would she turn from him again, or could he sweep her off her feet, turn that cool, even head of hers with a final appeal to the passion she had confessed? His heart throbbed. He loved his sister. He had risked everything for her, unable to deny the equity of her claim upon him; nevertheless, she was no more to him than a stranger in comparison with his wife.

Marion soothed her gradually, or her emotion wept itself to rest. She suggested they should accompany her home, but Marion refused gently.

"We will follow you by-and-by," she said. "I want to speak to Stephen. What do your mother and Mamie think of the breaking off of your engagement?"

"They are surprised, and Mamie at least is glad; she always disliked John Tregenna. Of course, they imagine there has been a quarrel. Mother is a little afraid people will talk."

Garth accompanied his sister to the hall door. The least he could do was to show how deeply he respected and admired her. Now that they had spoken to each other openly on the subject of her engagement, the barrier which had existed between them was broken down, and they drew together again despite her hopeless love for the man he had destroyed.

The girl's attitude towards her brother was typical of the effect his power wrought upon most of those associated with him. She had not uttered a word of reproach; she had only wept over the havoc his conduct had wrought in their lives, as though he were one of the forces of nature, which could only be endured by mortals with patience and fortitude.

Garth stood for a moment watching her hurry down the hill.

The wind caught her skirt, blowing it from side to side, and winding it tightly round her limbs at last, and there was something in the flutter of the draperies, her buoyant tread, the poise of the whole light, slim figure, so supple and yielding in its grace, which was an emblem of her storm-tossed soul.

He drew a deep breath, fortifying himself for the scene which awaited him—the scene of which the issue would determine his life's story.

CHAPTER XLVIII

GOOD-BYE

MARION was waiting for him. She stood by the fireplace, with her steadfast grey eyes on the door. But he was not afraid of them this morning, or of her. She was only a girl after all, and she loved him. He would conquer her as he had conquered Tregenna. This was to be his day of victory. He spoke first.

"Rachel is greatly relieved. One can well understand. Poor girl, she has behaved splendidly."

"Yes. But I do not understand why you did not make her completely happy with an assurance concerning Vivian. If he is to be restored to his proper place there is no reason why she should not marry him."

"It seems," he said deliberately, "that Tregenna is not going to speak. He has been content, you see, with the mere withdrawal of his claim to her hand."

She began to breathe deeply, rapidly, and her gaze grew still more intent, and her face paler, if possible, than before.

"I should not have thought, from his behaviour to Rachel, that he was the man to hold his hand," she said. "But if he does?" Her voice thrilled. "What then, Stephen, what then?"

"Surely it is all the better for me—for us—if the girl's release costs nothing? I had hopes, though I dared not reckon on them."

"You had hopes, you had hopes!" she repeated passionately. "The more he remains silent you will remain silent too? Again nothing will be done for Vivian!"

"I gave you my word I would save Rachel from Tregenna, that is all."

"I understood you were going to confess!" she cried, clasping her hands. "You knew I thought so. Can it be possible I was mistaken? Is there to be no atonement after all? I have worked myself up to such a pitch of hope and expectation that I cannot bear disappointment. You *must* mean to confess! You meant it yesterday, did you not?"

"When I left you—yes," he replied. "Before and after—no. I bullied the bully; that was my first and last idea. It was a dangerous game; he might have turned on me. I reminded him that to be an accessory after the fact is a crime, and that his wife's death was suspicious, and turned his huge bulk to jelly. He is a coward at heart, like all such men."

"In fact, you played a trick on him?"

"As it succeeded, let us call it diplomacy."

"Fear has ranged him on your side," she said dully; "against Vivian—and me."

"Not against you," said the man. "I will not have you put it so. Your side is my side—my side is yours. Marion, this dissension of ours has lasted long enough. You were a girl the other day, now you make yourself my judge! What right have you to take this tone? I have been a fool to bear with it, and both of us have paid for a delicacy which was only weakness on my part! You think too much, you analyse too much, you keep your soul on a rack of scruples, when another woman would weep a little, and forgive. I am your husband! How dare you forget that? You vowed to obey me, to cleave to me through every misfortune; how does your conscience reconcile the marriage service with our present existence? If there is a hell in another world, why are you so anxious to punish me in this?"

"It is you who have no right to take this tone," she said. "You know that nothing but your sin could have alienated me from you, that your obduracy alone keeps us apart. You cannot say I am unforgiving when all I ask of you is to repair the harm you have done."

"You asked me to save Rachel."

"By honesty—not a trick."

"You think more of Vivian than you do of me. After all, he is not your brother."

"He is an innocent man whom you have wronged. No tie of blood could give him a greater claim upon me than that."

"He does not know how to suffer as you are making me suffer. Whatever his life has been during the past three years, it has been happier than mine!"

"I cannot believe that," she said, breathing deeply, "since the remedy is in your own power."

"No—in yours alone, Marion. Forgive me."

"I must not, I dare not," she said.

"You shall!" He caught her hands with sudden violence and drew her towards him. "I love you, I love you, and you are my wife—nothing can alter that! You admitted yesterday that you cared for me, and you shall not make us both miserable any longer."

"Let me go, Stephen!"

"I have never appealed to you like this before," he said, "and you must listen to me. O Marion, O Marion, if I were sick, would you not nurse me? If I were poor, would you not work for me? Then why desert me because my condition is even more deserving of your pity than if I were poor or ill?"

"Your arguments are false," she said, "and you are hurting my wrists, Stephen."

"Not as much as you are hurting my heart. Good God, you talk of passion! Do you know what it means?" His lips covered hers. "I love you, and you are driving me mad! You are an icicle, not a woman; your self-control is self-righteousness, not virtue. I would go to the gallows with you; you are so fearful of soiling your white soul that you draw the hem of your skirt away from me!"

She sobbed.

"Stephen, Stephen! I do not recognise you when you talk like this."

"I have been too reticent; it was a mistake."

"If you had confessed I would have gone away with you; I would have done anything. Will you confess?"

"Can you not be content to leave everything to me? You

are not responsible for my actions. It will be I, not you, who will have to pay if there is to be a settling day."

"It would be wrong," she said, "and because I care for you I will not encourage you in your sin."

"A wife's duty is to obey!"

"Under all conditions? If you asked me to commit a murder, should I obey?"

"But I do not ask you to commit a murder—only—only——"

"Yes, you do!" she cried wildly. "What else would it be if I obeyed you but the murder of your soul and mine! It is not true love that you have for me or you would not hesitate to do right for my sake."

"It is true love."

"Then confess."

"No. You shall not make conditions. Am I not your husband?" His breath was upon her cheek, his eyes burned. For an instant she seemed to hesitate, as though she were on the point of yielding. She trembled at the temptation which assailed her. Her hands clutched his arm tightly, and her heart throbbed. She loved him; whatever he was, she loved him. Culpable, hard in many ways, he was still more to her than any other man in the world could be. There was still a magnetic attraction for her in his looks, his touch, his voice. She could not remember a time when she had been indifferent to him; it was just as difficult to imagine a time would ever come when she would cease to care. That her mind disapproved of him to-day did not lessen his undoubted physical attraction. He was a handsome man, whose least trick of manner was dear to her, and she longed, she panted, to give in. A clear conscience would not console her for loneliness. She felt as though she had not the strength to repulse him again. After all, what had been the use of her Spartan conduct? She had not induced him to confess; she had not saved Vivian; what he had done for Rachel he would have done without any prompting from her, no doubt. She had only led herself and him a life of futile misery for nearly three years.

As he kissed her again she felt herself weakening. All sorts of doubts beset her. Was the view he held—or professed to

hold—of her duty the correct one after all? Ought she to leave him to fight out the fight with his conscience and his God alone?

Her almost superhuman resolution melted more and more. She had been so brave, so firm. But she was tired. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. It would be almost happiness to throw the whole burden upon him—who had created it, to return his embrace, to forget.

"Marion," he murmured, "will you? You will!"

He felt her rigid figure relax.

"I do love you," she said. "It is very hard that you are not good."

"We will have a second honeymoon," he said thickly, "and put the past behind us for ever. It is only love which makes a man glad that he was born!"

A second honeymoon! The words took her back to her last and most perfect days of happiness. Could they come again? She looked at him wistfully. Why not? Why not? Tregenna was silenced, Rachel was staunch; nobody else would ever know. It was a mistake to say that virtue was its own reward. Her heart had been aching for years, and she had forgotten what it was like to feel gay. Stephen was only unhappy on her account; it was only she who kept the wretched past alive. He had no scruples; his theory of life, supported by his professional success, made him impervious to her criticism; or perhaps he lacked a sense.

He would not let her think quietly. His kisses disturbed her. She was feverish. . . .

If she yielded, what would she think of herself afterwards? Would his kisses stifle the pangs of her conscience? Would she love him more or less than she hated herself?

In a revulsion of feeling she thrust him from her.

"It is impossible, Stephen! Without repentance there can be no happiness for us."

He was so bitterly disappointed that he could not speak and released her without a word.

"I see now," she continued, "what a mistake I have made in remaining with you. I imagined my influence would be of some avail; it has proved to be of none at all. You are as obdurate

to-day as you ever were, and—my broken heart can bear no more torture. It is better for both of us that I should leave you altogether."

He gazed at her with unfaltering, relentless eyes which the furnace of passion had turned to steel.

"Perhaps it is."

"You are willing that I should go?"

"Yes—if you refuse to be a true wife to me and if you desire to go."

"I dare not defy my conscience, Stephen."

"No—you have only the courage to break your marriage vows!"

"I suppose we shall never see things from the same point of view," she answered, sighing.

She turned to leave the room. He did not try to stop her; his heart was full of bitterness. He had humbled himself; he had begged and prayed of her like a love-sick boy; he had bared his very soul, and she had repulsed him. Yes, it was better that she should go. Their present mode of existence, always painful, would be unendurable henceforward.

She paused and looked back at him. Her features quivered. An uncontrollable impulse extended her hand to him in a final gesture of appeal.

"Stephen! If you only would!"

He did not answer, made no movement towards her.

"Will you?" she whispered once more. "For the last time, will you?"

"No."

She flinched as though he had struck her, and her pale face grew paler still. With bowed head she left him, shutting the door upon their married life.

Garth walked to the window. His hands were clenched so tightly that the nails bruised the palms, but he did not feel any pain for some time.

She was going to leave him. He had assented to her proposition with almost brutal readiness, but in spite of that he could not realise it. He had grown used to their miserable relationship; even when she had threatened on previous occasions to

leave him the idea of it had not come fully home to him. It was almost impossible to imagine what the house in Harley Street would be like without her. He could not picture the drawing-room without her books and needlework, with that forbidden door on the floor above standing wide and desolate, the sensation of descending to a solitary breakfast, of returning day by day to an empty house. Bobbit's death had made a gap which was visible enough, but the woman's absence was bound to leave a void far greater than the child's.

Her bedroom was overhead, and in the silence of the lonely, deserted mansion he could hear her moving about. She was packing. She meant it, then. Probably she intended to catch the afternoon train to London.

There was nothing to keep him any longer at Carnruan. He had arranged, indeed, to go home to-night; but how could they travel together under the circumstances? When they reached London perhaps she would offer to shake hands with him before she went another way! He could see himself calling a hansom for her, separating her luggage from his own, telling the cabman where to go, then entering his own brougham and driving home! The picture was exaggerated, no doubt, because she would have to fetch her clothes and other possessions from Harley Street—unless she sent word to her maid, whom she had left behind, to pack them and bring them to her new abode.

People would talk. He thought little of that yet awhile. The sting of scandal was yet to come. For the time he was oblivious of everything outside themselves.

He heard a servant go upstairs presently, as though in answer to a ring, and then the gardener's boy ran down the carriage drive. Probably he had been sent to order a fly. Garth began to wonder what the villagers would think when they saw her driving away alone, and what questions his own people would ask him. Of course, Rachel would guess the truth. But she would not talk, she who had been as staunch throughout as any man could have been, and the others were all blind and thought him happy.

If he waited in the hall he would see her again before she left. An irresistible longing drew him to the door, but he set

his teeth and walked away again. It would be too weak to show sentiment before the very servants. She was going of her own accord, with his permission, and the least he could do was to bear it like a man.

By-and-by he heard her coming down the stairs.

As her footsteps drew near to the door a terrible struggle took place in his breast between love and pride. Even now, while his bitterness was fresh, he could not persuade himself that he was indifferent to her departure, and the thought that when she had once left him an indefinite period would elapse before they met again, prompted him to stop her before it was too late, and exchange a good-bye more in keeping with their old relationship than this cold farewell, while mingled anger and wounded feelings dissuaded him once more from making a painful scene.

In another moment it would be too late. He moistened his dry lips, hesitating still; his hands opened and shut; he gazed at the door with eyes of anguish.

Most unexpectedly she saved him the initiative by coming to him. She was ready for departure, and looked very pale and self-possessed.

"I thought I had better tell you I am going to say good-bye to your mother and sisters and Constance on my way to the station," she said.

He could not check an expression of anxious inquiry.

"I shall only tell the truth to Rachel," she added quietly. "To the others I shall say I am anxious to get back to London, and leave you to make what explanation you please."

"As you like," he replied, with obvious relief. Of course, everybody would have to know soon, but he felt at this moment that even a brief respite was something to be grateful for.

There was a pause then, and for the first time she showed signs of embarrassment.

"Good-bye, Stephen."

He made no reply.

"I suppose it would be foolish to shake hands!" she said, nervously. "And you are too angry?"

"It would be a hollow ceremony, would it not?" he answered

"As you will not allow us to be husband and wife, certainly we cannot be friends. Good-bye."

CHAPTER XLIX

"A LUCY WOMAN"

THERE was a peacefulness about the Vicarage almost painfully at variance with her mood when Marion was shown in. Constance was alone in the drawing-room with a book suitable for Sunday reading, and a sleeping dog on the rug at her feet.

"We were quite surprised to hear that you and Stephen had arrived," she said. "Why did you not come to us, instead of taking up your quarters at that dreary, great house, which must be full of sad memories for you?"

"It was very kind of you," replied Marion, "but as we came on a flying visit it did not seem worth while to put anybody out."

"A flying visit?" repeated Constance in surprise. "Are you not waiting for the wedding, then?"

"There is to be no wedding," said Marion, somewhat embarrassed. "Has not Rachel brought you the news yet? She and Tregenna have come to the conclusion that they are unsuited to each other after all. I am very glad. I am sure she would never have been happy with him."

"You astonish me!" said Constance. "We saw Rachel at church this morning, but she told us nothing about it."

"Perhaps she did not know herself till afterwards," suggested Marion.

"That must have been the case, I suppose," said Constance, with an air of dignity. "St John will be surprised. But on second thoughts I am not surprised. Mr Tregenna seemed to me a very bad style of man, and one could not deceive a girl so nice-minded as Rachel caring either for him or for his money. I must say I am very glad the match is broken off."

It was a fact. Mrs St John Garth's disapproval of Rachel's fiancé had not been lessened by a tinge of jealousy concerning

his wealth. To have had Rachel, whom she had formerly patronised, mistress of a magnificent mansion within easy driving distance of her old home, would have been slightly galling to the young vicar's wife, although Constance would not have admitted even to her own soul that such a germ of envy could exist in her well-regulated breast.

"Is St John out?" asked Marion. "I am returning to London by the afternoon train, and wished to say good-bye to him."

"What! You are leaving us already—and on Sunday!" exclaimed Constance. "Surely it was not worth while coming at all!"

"Stephen's time is not his own, as you know, and he wanted to see his people." Marion's voice was constrained. "He may wait for the night train, but I—I do not care for travelling at night when it can be avoided. You will see him, no doubt."

"I am expecting St John home every moment," said Constance. "You were not at church this morning?"

"No; we—could not come."

"You will have a cup of tea?"

"Thank you, Constance; I am afraid I must not wait. I have to call at The Haven, and I have not too much time as it is."

"I must not make you miss your train," said Constance politely. "I shall be coming up to London for a few days shortly with my mother in order to do a little shopping. I shall see you then."

Marion looked startled.

"Yes—yes, of course," she said hurriedly.

She took her leave, and went to The Haven.

Rachel and Mamie, who had seen her drive up, ran to the door to meet her. Rachel looked another girl already. Her eyes were alight, her cheeks almost feverishly flushed. Mamie too was in the best of spirits.

They hugged Marion, and brought her indoors.

"You cat," said Mamie, "what have you been doing all the morning? We thought surely you would have come in after church. And we are both full of conversation. Isn't it lovely that Rachel isn't going to marry that beast after all?"

"Mamie, Mamie, what language," murmured Mrs Garth's gentle, admonishing voice in the background. "How are you, Marion, my dear?"

"I always said he was a beast, and I always shall!" retorted the irrepressible Mamie defiantly. "I can't help it, mother; there isn't a polite word to describe him. I thought Rachel must be mad, but, thank goodness, she has recovered her senses in time!"

"And while I have been busy breaking an engagement Mamie has been busy making one," said Rachel, with a gleam of girlish fun to which she had long been a stranger.

Mamie turned scarlet.

"How dare you, Rachel! I said you weren't to talk about it!"

"Well, you see, I didn't talk about it, or I should have told Marion this morning. You don't want to keep it a secret from Marion and Stephen, do you, you goose?"

"What is this, Mamie?" asked Marion, trying to smile and enter into the girls' lighter mood. "Tell me at once, miss."

"I heard from Adolphus Wetherby a few days ago," replied Mamie. "He—is doing very well, and wants me to go out to Australia and marry him in a few months."

"And you love him? You are happy? Oh, Mamie!" cried Marion softly, and took the young girl in her arms and kissed her.

Mamie grew still redder, and choked.

"I think he's rather nice, don't you?"

"I always liked him. What a lucky, lucky girl you are!"

"Yes; she is as lucky as I am!" said Rachel, then glanced hurriedly at her mother and sister. "If I had married Mr Tregenna, and we had been unhappy together, how awful it would have been! I can imagine nothing more terrible than to be tied to the wrong man. But I am sure you are not making a mistake, Mamie."

"I reckon we shall get along pretty well," said Mamie in her quaint way. "I've calculated all the chances for and against it, and I think we've got most of our quarrelling over already! Where's Stephen?"

"He's coming to see you by-and-by. I am going home by the afternoon train, so I must not stay long."

"Do you mean you are going back to London alone?" asked Rachel quickly.

Marion repeated that she did not like travelling at night, and that Stephen would follow her to London by the last train; but although the explanation satisfied Mrs Garth and Mamie, it was obvious that Rachel guessed there was something beneath it. She linked her arm in Marion's.

"Come upstairs for ten minutes, Marion; I want to talk to you. Mamie, take your inquisitive ears away."

"I'm sure you can't have any secrets with Marion, and goodness knows when I shall see her again," grumbled Mamie.

"Read your darling's letter for the hundredth time," replied Rachel flippantly. "I am sure you don't know it by heart yet. I caught a glimpse of it this morning, and it was only half worn out."

Mamie howled at Rachel, who fled, dragging Marion with her. As soon as they were alone, however, Rachel sobered.

"Why are you and Stephen returning to London by different trains?"

Marion sat down on the window-sill of the girl's bedroom and played with the tassel of the blind. Her face, now the mask had dropped, looked pale and weary.

"Everybody will know soon," she said, "but I have only the courage to tell you. Stephen can say what he likes. I am going to leave him."

"Oh, Marion! I don't know why, but I suspected it directly you came in."

"It is for the best," said Marion sadly. "What is the use of going on in the old way? *You* know what there is between us and what our life has been for nearly three years. I hoped to influence him for his good, but it is useless to build upon that any longer. My heart is broken, Rachel."

Rachel hugged her knees, and gazed at her sister-in-law blankly.

"I don't know what he will do without you. Why now, Marion, more than formerly?"

"Because he promised me to save you from Tregenna, and I imagined, naturally, that he meant to confess and restore Vivian's

good name: it seemed to me the only way. But he found another way. He frightened Tregenna about his wife's death. It was only bluff, of course—we know nothing—but it succeeded. I wish it had failed. It has hardened him, if possible. He is more determined than ever that he will not confess."

"Was that your idea? I never hoped for anything of the sort," replied Rachel drearily. "I've got used to Vivian's ruin. One can get used to anything."

"We have no right to get used to it," said Marion. "And you who loved him!"

"Don't!" cried the girl, her voice shrill with anguish. "I daren't think about it. What is the use? What can we do? Stephen knows how much he was to me. I told him long before I heard the truth from you. But it hasn't made any difference. He feels he can't speak, with his position, I suppose. And one can't make him."

"Rachel, what a wonderful sister you are! I don't believe there is another woman in England who would have been so loyal."

"You trusted me," replied Rachel. "What else could I do?"

They were silent for a while, Rachel musing, with downcast eyes full of tears, Marion gazing out of the window. She rose at length with a sigh, and they said good-bye to each other. It was on the tip of Rachel's tongue to make some plea for her brother, but she seemed to feel it would be useless or that an appeal was unjustified.

"You will send me your address?" she asked wistfully. "Do not let us lose sight of each other, Marion."

"Indeed, no," said Marion. "Could you think such a thing? What you have borne for his sake makes you very dear to me, Rachel, apart from the affection I have always had for you. Dear sister!"

They embraced again. Rachel wept, and Marion's face expressed even greater anguish.

"As soon as I have found a new home I will write to you," she added. "And perhaps one day you will come and stay with me, Rachel?"

"I will come whenever you ask me. Shall you let Stephen know where you are?"

"Certainly," replied Marion. "I have nothing to be ashamed of that I should hide. At any time, if he chooses, he can call me back to him. He knows that. Our separation is his work, not mine."

Mrs Garth was aggrieved that her daughter-in-law should be hurrying away so soon.

"I have scarcely seen you," she said. "After coming so far I think you might have stayed with us a little longer. When will you be down again?"

"I do not know—not for some time, I am afraid," replied Marion hesitatingly. "But you are not lonely, dear; you have Rachel, Mamie, and St John with you."

"It is true," said Mrs Garth, "although I shall lose Marion my baby, soon, and I would not be selfish enough to hope that Rachel and St John will spend their lives in this secluded spot. But I must not repine," she added, with a look of wistful resignation. "It comes to all women—that age when photographs take the place of children's faces."

"But I have not gone away yet, darling!" cried Mamie, hugging her, "and Rachel isn't going to be married to John Tregenna, and Stephen and Marion will soon come again, of course. Good gracious, one would think they were all going away for ever, you dismal old mother!"

Mrs Garth wiped her eyes, smiling.

"Yes. And a foolish and ungrateful old mother! What woman ever had better sons and daughters than mine? Ah, girls, let us be grateful to Stephen. It is to Stephen, God bless him, that we owe our peace and comfort—to Stephen, who has been my crutch since he was a mere boy. Marion, you are a lucky woman. Although he is my son, I dare to say it. No one ever had a better husband than you!"

Marion and Rachel exchanged a glance of almost wild emotion. A hysterical laugh broke suddenly from the girl.

"Marion ought to be very grateful to our family, I am sure for the happiness she owes us; but if we keep her any longer she will miss her train."

CHAPTER L

THE EMPTY HOME

A FEW hours after Marion drove to Craddoc Station Garth followed her. His farewell visits to his family had been brief and reticent. It was not necessary to tell anyone yet that he and Marion had separated, and a man is not in haste to spread news of that sort. By-and-by, when his own people and outsiders began to wonder, he would have to render some sort of explanation.

It was a dreary drive and a dreary journey. Even now he could scarcely believe she had gone for ever. She would surely relent. She was his wife. When her anger had died away, she would feel sorry and return to him, or at least give him the option of taking her back on the old terms. Meanwhile he would have to endure the bitter experience of holding his tongue because there was no one to talk to, of eating alone, going out alone, above all, worst of all, returning alone. And people would always be asking him: "How is your wife? Where is your wife?"

Fortunately, there was work to be done. The career to which he had sacrificed his honour, his child, his wife, his soul, still remained to him. He plunged into the old routine at once.

At lunch-time Marion's maid came to him with her eyes wide open.

"Oh, please, sir, I've had a letter from my mistress. I'm to pack all her clothes, and the photographs in her room, and take them to the Langholm Hotel! Is it right?"

"Where is the letter?" asked Garth.

"Here, sir. It came by express."

Garth took the note from the girl's hand and scanned it. Marion had simply given in tructions without comment.

"It is quite right," he replied harshly. "Why should you doubt it? Mrs Garth is going away for a change."

It was a lame excuse, and he had the annoyance of observing that the girl's curiosity was only increased. Was it the wild

hope that she might return after all which made him conceal the truth till the last possible moment ?

He heard no more of Marion's wardrobe, but later in the day the butler told him that the maid had been dismissed by Mrs Garth, with a month's wages in lieu of notice. The man was also curious, no doubt. Garth could imagine the talk going on below stairs. The servants of the establishment were necessarily better informed than anyone of the strained relations which had existed for so long between husband and wife, and they guessed—no doubt they guessed—and their pin-pricks increased his discomforture.

"To-morrow I will tell the first gossip I meet that we have separated, and in twenty-four hours there will be no longer any occasion for concealment," he thought.

But when the morrow came he still refrained, giving her a chance to change her mind, and in a gust of sentiment opened the door of her bedroom and glanced in. It had been freshly swept, and bore the air of disuse familiar to the guest-chamber of the house. All the pretty knick-knacks which a woman gathers about her were gone. The silver brushes had vanished from the dressing-table, the photographs from the mantelpiece, the prayer-book—his gift—which used to lie on the little table beside her bed, the clothes from the wardrobe and drawers. There was nothing—nothing left of her, not even the faint odour of violets, which was the only perfume she ever used, and associated in his mind with her. He remembered the day they bought the furniture for this room. It seemed so long ago, like an event in another life, which had only bequeathed an aching, stinging memory to this.

CHAPTER LI

MRS GARTH OF QUEEN'S SQUARE

MARION's inclination was to bury herself in a part of the country where she was unknown, and live the life of a recluse. But she was too sensible and conscientious a woman to give way to such a morbid desire. She had left her husband because she had

given up her former hope of influencing him, and could bear the strain of such an existence no longer ; nevertheless, the forcible step she had taken had not put an end to her duty towards him or the world. He had sinned, and refused to confess. It became her place, as she saw it, to make amends for him as best she could—to do all the good she could for his sake. To expect happiness for herself or him was now out of the question. She could only hope for that peace of mind which proceeds from the consciousness of a duty done.

It was her intention to devote her fortune and her life to the poor. The money which had been almost useless to her might bring sunshine into darkened corners, relief to the sick, help to the hungry. Stephen in his own way did much ; she had not his great gift of knowledge, but patience and love could do a good deal, and she prayed that every deed of hers which was pleasing in God's eyes might be set down in mitigation of her husband's sin.

She had never cared for society, and it cost her no sacrifice to give it up entirely. To her few intimate friends she meant to write by-and-by ; from the sight of her hosts of acquaintances she would merely disappear, leaving her character in Stephen's hands. She was not afraid that he would allow a breath of scandal to be whispered against her name. Whatever blame there was to bear he would take upon himself, and he was not a man likely to suffer from mere impertinence.

She took a quiet, old-fashioned house in Queen's Square, Bloomsbury, and furnished it quickly and plainly, then wrote to Garth :

"I mean to live a busy life in helping other people, since I cannot help you. If you hear of any especially deserving case which you cannot attend to yourself, perhaps you will send a line to me? I also beg of you to let me know if Vivian communicates with you or you should hear anything of him."

Over the signature she hesitated. To say "Your affectionate wife" to the man she had left would be absurd ; to write "yours sincerely" like a mere acquaintance seemed as unnatural to the woman who had been his wife. In the end she merely signed

herself "Marion," and directly the letter ha' gone regretted she had written at all, when it would have been so much easier to tell Rachel to give him her address in case he fell ill, or had any other reason for desiring to communicate with her. He might take it as a sign of regret that she had left him, and an invitation to beg her to return, and oppressed by this idea she went in terror of every ring at the bell. But the next few days passed without any sign from him, and she began to pick up the threads of the life she had chosen. She made friends with clergymen and doctors—the men who went among the masses and knew their needs; her face became familiar in hospitals and slums; she penetrated into dens of misery which she never imagined to exist in the days of her sheltered girlhood at Carnruan. Her courage was remarkable; her health, born of wholesome blood and a regular life, withstood all contamination; her patience and pity were infinite. She never turned her back on a deserving case; she was rarely taken in. She had an instinct which supplied the place of experience in detecting imposture, and perfect tact in dealing with a class which is most difficult of all to aid—the poverty which is too proud to ask, and dies in silence like a wounded dog. Her greatest pity and most time were given to these; the broken-down genteel, the governesses, the clerks, the men and women who work with their brains for a pittance until they fall ill, or grow old, or get left behind in the wild race for existence of an overcrowded city. Many strange and painful stories came under her notice—stories of such misery, some of them, that even her own unfortunate marriage sank into insignificance. In one way this experience was good medicine for her, in other ways it wounded her, and gave her great disgust, a great weariness of life. There seemed to be so much more misery than happiness in the world. The woman who was religious began to wonder why God created so many people to be wretched. It troubled the calm waters of her faith. At Carnruan, that secluded village of fisher folk and farmers where everybody led a regular, decent life, the problem of the universe had not confronted her so plainly. This whirlpool of London—of a London which she had never seen till now—caught her very soul and played with it.

But her character withstood the strain. When she found herself face to face with a dead wall of hideous, incontrovertible fact she did not shut her eyes, or shrink, or turn away. She fought vice and disease and misfortune with the philosophy of patience. It did not say that the sufferings of humanity were motiveless and evil because her finite mind could not discern reason for them. The world was growing wiser. Perhaps a time would come when men would be able to understand God's works.

Frequently in her hospital experiences she heard her husband's name mentioned, and again and again it was brought home to her how much good he did, and how very much the profession thought of him. She was told of cases in which his science had prevailed after other doctors had given them up. Her heart was often warmed by words of praise and admiration bestowed upon his name. She thought the more of them that they were uttered in no spirit of flattery, for her identity was unknown to any of those with whom she came in contact. She was "a Mrs Garth of Queen's Square," that was all. In a city like London few would think of connecting two persons of similar name, or inquiring if they were related to each other. As she never spoke of her husband, and lived alone, she was regarded as a widow, and saw no reason why she should explain. Her private affairs were her own, and as she did not cultivate any society there was no one to reproach her for her reserve.

CHAPTER LII

VIVIAN REAPPEARS

MEANWHILE Vivian was still in England. He was no farther away than Soho, indeed, lost amid a swarm of Italian waiters and foreign riff-raff of all sorts. He had a room in a tall house overlooking a patch of grass and a few trees securely enclosed by iron railings. The landlady cooked his breakfast, and he ate his other meals at a little, cheap foreign restaurant. The neighbourhood was stuffy, but he was beginning to get used to the absence

of air and exercise, which had been so necessary to him in the days of his prosperity.

The man was still on the downward track. There was too much against him. Disgrace he might have fought and conquered now that the police had given up looking for him, but he had been vanquished by Rachel's supposed defection. His nature was one which could be made or marred by his affections, by a woman who loved him and whom he loved. But he could not face adversity alone, and he had made no effort to leave the country and find an opening in the Colonies. He had drifted by natural gravitation back to the Turf, which had been the original cause of his ruin. Sometimes he was lucky and won a little, sometimes he lost; but he still kept his head above water in a way, and he had enough pride and self-respect left to shirk appealing to Marion for the further help she had promised him. He would not explain to her what he had done with her last gift; besides—he was a Carew of Poldinnick still, with the lingering instincts of a gentleman.

This evening, dining leisurely at a restaurant which gave four courses and cheese for eighteenpence, he happened to glance over an old newspaper which was lying, grubbly and neglected on the table by his side. An exclamation broke suddenly from his lips.

"On the 7th inst., Colonel Robert Carew of Poldinnick Carnruan, Cornwall, aged 65."

It was the first intimation he had received of his father's death and he turned white, and the paper rustled in his hands.

"My father dead!" he muttered. "Good God! And I have no idea of it."

His father had believed him guilty and disowned him, but that could not destroy the emotion a son must feel at such a moment. Vivian, least of all men, was likely to forget filial affection—the bond of blood which nothing could break. It was his father who was dead; his father, who had loved him once.

He glanced with dim eyes at the date of the paper. It was several months old. While he had been going his dreary way his father had been seized with his last illness, and buried with a soul of his own name to follow him to the grave.

A lump swelled in his throat, and he blinked away the mist which shut out the shabby, tarnished splendours of the little restaurant. To his credit be it said that it was grief alone, the sense of loss, which moved him. He had forgotten to wonder if his father had relented and made him his heir. His heart was aching over the thought that the Colonel had died under the impression that his only son was criminal, and that he would never know the truth.

He had had dinner enough. The smell of greasy food and clatter of plates made him feel sick. He rose, to the surprise of the waiter, who was used to customers with great appetites, who sat through their eighteenpennyworth to the last morsel of cheese, and made his way home.

His father was dead. Last time they met he had seemed in the best of health; but Vivian reproached himself for the lack of interest he had shown. He ought to have remembered that his father was an old man, liable to a recurrence of a serious complaint, and kept in touch with Marion. She must think he had grown callous, and did not care; but it was a mistake, although perhaps he had not known till now how much he did care.

He mounted the stairs to his lofty lodgings with a heart as heavy as his feet. What changes! All the bonds which connected him with the old life, the old world of ease, honour, and affection, seemed breaking one by one. He had never expected his father's forgiveness, or thought of asking for it again; nevertheless, he felt the lonelier at this moment that the old man was dead and the old home deserted.

He wrote to Marion at once, telling her he had only just heard the news, and asking her to come and see him, as he was naturally anxious for particulars. He directed the envelope to Harley Street, unaware that she had left Garth, and took it to the post himself.

The past was receding farther and farther from his gaze. Often he had found it difficult to believe that he had ever had a home, and a social position, and the world's consideration. Nobody thought anything of him now. His manner—the manner of the upper class—had gone. A workman jostled

him in the street without apology; the seedy foreigners who frequented the same resorts regarded him as one of themselves. Only his landlady seemed to perceive a difference between him and her usual lodgers, and called him "sir" sometimes.

It was natural, as he sat smoking till the small hours, that the question most men would have asked themselves at once should crop up in his mind at last. What about his father's will? Had he left him out of it entirely, and if so, to whom did all the property go? Money would render his life more tolerable, make it possible, indeed, for him to lead a comfortable existence abroad; but he had no hopes. Everything had been against him throughout, and would be against him to the end. Prolonged misfortune had given a pessimistic turn to a nature once sanguine and cheerful. He never expected anything but ill luck nowadays.

All the same, he did not feel bitter towards his father's memory. The old man had considered himself justified in his sternness, with some excuse, and Vivian was willing to believe it had pained his father as much to disown him as it had pained him to be disowned.

"I wouldn't think twice about the money," he told himself wistfully, "if I could hear the poor old fellow had changed his mind and believed in me at the last."

It was difficult to sleep that night, and he lay awake thinking and thinking till it was almost time to get up. He recalled the childhood in which his father had petted him; the school days, when his first gold watch had marked such an era in his life; the college days, when his father's generosity had afforded him all the reasonable pleasure a young fellow could want. He had only kept straight! An agony of remorse, not the first he had felt, God knows, shot through him like the thrust of a knife. All his troubles dated from that first self-indulgence, that first disobedience which had led so speedily to hypocrisy and lies, and the blackmailer's fatal visit to Carnruan. It had been so trivial, so unnecessary, that first downward step. How little he had imagined whither it would take him! The mere fancy for a new pastime, the more piquant that it was forbidden, had lured him to his first race meeting, and ruined his life.

He expected Marion in the morning, and waited at home for her, but she did not come, for the reason that his letter forwarded from Harley Street had not yet reached her.

"She is tired of me," he thought. "She too has deserted me. Perhaps it is Garth who thinks it presumptuous on my part to ask her to visit me, and will not let her come."

Nevertheless, fearing she would call and find him out, at lunch-time he made a frugal meal of bread and cheese at home. He could not believe she would ignore him altogether.

It was four o'clock when the landlady appeared at the door.

"There's a lady to see you, Mr Jones," she said. "Is she to come up?"

"Good heavens! have you left her in the hall?" cried Vivian. He dashed down the steep, dark staircase, and brought Marion up. When the door was shut she kissed him.

"My dear boy, I only had your letter half-an-hour ago. I am no longer at Harley Street."

"You have moved?" he asked in surprise.

"Never mind me," she replied hastily. "How about yourself? You are well, Vivian?"

"So-so. I drag along somehow."

"Why did you not write? I could not communicate with you, anxious as I was to do so."

"I hadn't any good news to tell you—nothing I was proud of. I'm a broken man, Marion; I shall come to a bad end yet."

"Don't," she said, her voice sharp with distress. "I cannot bear to think so. Your day will come still. Perhaps the dawn is already breaking."

"My father? What of my father, Marion?"

She had seated herself on the shabby leather couch, and the young man sat down beside her. She took his hand, as though to comfort him with her sympathetic, sisterly touch.

"He had been failing for some time. We expected another of his old attacks, and stayed at Poldinnick, Stephen and I. I was with him till the last."

"Did he speak of me?" asked Vivian hoarsely.

"He died unconscious."

"But before the end—before the end?"

"He did not speak of you, and, much as I desired to do so, I shrank from troubling him at such a time."

"I hoped he had softened towards me," murmured the young man, his eyes downcast, "but it was not to be, I suppose. It is very hard, Marion."

"Poor boy! You don't inquire about the will."

"I know now, without asking, that it has nothing to do with me. I should not have cared so much if he had only come to believe in me."

"He left everything to me, Vivian, and that is just the same as if he had left it to you. I merely regard myself as your trustee."

"You propose to pass everything on to me!"

"Certainly. What else could I do? Is it likely I should avail myself of the poor old man's mistake in order to steal what is yours in equity?"

Vivian flushed.

"And Garth—what does he say to it?"

"Stephen could not interfere if he would, and would not if he could. Besides, as you know, I am rich already."

"Oh, Marion, what a good woman you are!"

He stooped and kissed her hand.

"You mustn't try to make me conceited. There is no 'goodness' required—only common fair dealing. You will be happier now, my poor Vivian."

"Happier!" he repeated bitterly. For an instant the idea of wealth had squared his shoulders and thrown up his head. Now he drooped again, and the colour in his cheeks faded. "There is a curse on me," he said. "Nothing will ever prosper with me again. I am alone. What should I do with money?"

"At anyrate," she replied, glancing round her, "you can cease hiding in this squalid neighbourhood amid these gloomy surroundings, and buy yourself ease and luxury, if you will, in another land. I cannot understand why you are still here, and why you did not take advantage of my offer."

"I could not accept any more of your own money from you, Marion; my father's fortune is a different matter. You are right—to be rich is something. One can always buy companionship whatever one is."

Marion was regarding him thoughtfully.

"Vivian," she said, "have you forgotten Rachel?"

"No," he said, flushing again; "I try to forget her."

"Why did you not go to Carnruan that time, as you intended?"

"I did go," he answered in a low tone. "If she had been true I might have exerted myself to make something of my life, despite the obstacles in the way, but I found her in the arms of—John Tregenna!"

"Ah!" cried Marion. "That explains everything."

"Tregenna of all men! Good Lord! A fellow who has risen from the ranks—a great, coarse, overbearing ruffian, with nothing but his money to recommend him. I saw them through the window, and went away stunned. I suppose she has married him by this time?"

"She is not married. She will never marry him."

He breathed quickly.

"Do you mean that, Marion? How is it? Have they quarrelled?"

"She never cared for him. Her engagement was a piece of what some people would call Quixotic generosity."

"I cannot understand that. A girl does not marry out of 'generosity'!"

"He was very fond of her," continued Marion hastily, "and she thought it was her duty, for some reason, to take pity on him. At anyrate, she is free now. She has returned him his ring and his presents, and it is publicly understood that everything is at an end between them. In my heart of hearts I do not believe she has ever cared, or will ever care, for any man but you."

"If I dared to think so!" Vivian rose, and took a turn round the room, pressing his hands together. "But I cannot believe it. Who am I that she should remain faithful through so much? Your affection for me deceives you, my kind sister. You would convince me that what I desire is true."

"It would not be an act of kindness to buoy you up with false hopes," she responded gravely; "and it may be, as you say, that I deceive myself."

"If it could be so!" He sighed. "Oh, God, if it could be so!"

"Shall I sound her for you?"

"Oh, Marion!"

Her kindled eyes sought the floor. She mused warmly, deeply. It was evident to her that the command of money would be a curse to the young man, not a blessing, in his present frame of mind. Injustice had made him an Ishmaelite. As the hand of law and order was turned against him, so would he turn, when his opportunity came, against the society which had cast him out, and pay his debt with violence and disorder. All this she read—and more, with her clear sight—in the subdued vehemence of his voice, the feverish fire of his eyes. He was young, with all the appetite of youth and a vigorous constitution for the pleasures of the world, and for years he had been deprived of even moderate comfort, after being bred in luxury. What would become of him with a full purse in his pocket and all the temptations of the world at his feet—temptations from which there was neither family affection nor respect for his own name to preserve him? With his temperament, if he ran riot in every vice, he would consider himself justified.

It was only love which could save him—love, and a good woman's influence.

Rachel's turn to pay her brother's debt had come again.

Marion looked up at last.

"I would do it," she said, "if I thought I should not be enacting the part of her enemy in befriending you."

"Why should you think so? You do not believe me guilty after all?"

"No. But what is your mode of life to-day, my poor Vivian? I always loved her, but lately she has become very, very dear to me, and even for your sake I would not harm her."

"I swear to you I would turn over a new leaf! She might do anything with me. I would forgive Fortune all the ill turns she has served me if she would give me Rachel Garth. Indeed, you might trust me with her."

"I believe you," she said in a low tone of emotion, "and will do what I can for you."

"Bless you, Marion."

"Make yourself look trim and smart," she added. "Yo

may hear from me in a day or two; and all girls—and all women too, if it comes to that—are influenced by appearances. You must remember you are a good-looking fellow, Vivian."

He glanced, shamefaced, at his shabby boots, his frayed cuffs, and raised his hand to the beard which so effectually disguised him.

"I suppose she would scarcely know me," he murmured.

"A beard becomes you very well—if you take care of it; but I don't like your clothes, Vivian. Get yourself a new suit. You are a rich man now, remember. In earnest of it I have brought you some money."

She gave him a packet of bank notes, and then, rising, rested her two hands on his shoulders in her kind, gentle way.

"You used to look so well in blue serge, Vivian."

"I will buy a blue serge suit."

"Ugh! What an ugly tie!" There were tears in her eyes which she was trying to smile away.

"I will get another."

"And go to bed early, and eat wholesomely, and drink nothing at all!"

"You talk," he said, with a catch in his voice, "as though—as though I should see her soon."

"Perhaps you will, who knows? You must *deserve* to see her, or certainly she will not happen."

"I will do everything you tell me, Marion."

"And you shall prosper, please God, after all. Only a Man is worthy of such a girl as Rachel. She is unique. Even you cannot appreciate her as I do."

"Do not make my mouth water," he cried. "Do not try to make me more eager than I am for what I may never receive! Oh, write soon, write soon, Marion!"

"Yes," she said. "You may reckon upon hearing from me within the week."

CHAPTER LIII

"KEEP THEE ONLY UNTO HIM"

DIRECTLY Marion reached home she wrote to Rachel, asking her to come up to London.

"I have an especial desire for wishing to see you at once," she said, but did not mention Vivian's name; letters miscarried sometimes, and she dared not risk anything on his behalf.

By return she received a telegram in the affirmative from Rachel, and the following afternoon the girl arrived at Queen's Square.

"I was afraid you were ill, Marion," she said, embracing her sister-in-law. "Is anything the matter?"

"Something has happened. I have seen Vivian."

"Vivian!" Rachel turned red and white, and paused in the act of pulling off her gloves.

"He has only just heard of his father's death. He wrote asking me to come and see him, and directed the letter to Harley Street, of course. It arrived after lunch, and I went immediately."

"Where is he?" How is he? asked the girl huskily.

"I found him in poor lodgings in Soho, and told him he was a rich man. He is a good fellow. His chief anxiety was to learn if his father had mentioned him kindly before he died, not what had become of the money. He does not look well. He is much thinner than he used to be, haggard—hopeless, Rachel. One misses that buoyancy of temperament which made me think once that he would never grow old."

Rachel sat down, and went on removing her gloves. Her eyes looked dim, and she lowered them.

"Of course," she said, "he has had enough to make any man hopeless."

"You think so? I am glad to hear you say it! I want you to pity him. He has had more to bear than even we imagined. You remember my telling you he had spoken of stealing down to Carnruan to see you before he went abroad? He did see you, through the window, in Tregenna's arms!"

"Oh, Marion!"

"Imagine his feelings, for he loved you, desired you even above his safety and good name—as I am sure he desires you still."

"Oh, Marion!" cried the girl again.

"Do you know what he said when I told him I only regarded

myself as his trustee?—"I am alone. What should I do with money?" I reminded him that he might buy many comforts in another land at least. But he was bitter still, and I saw if I gave him money and nothing else he would only make evil use of it. He is in a savage mood. The world has treated him so ill that he hates it. Rachel, won't you come to his rescue? I can do nothing except to harm him without your aid. His future is in your hands."

"How can I help him?" asked Rachel, deeply agitated.

"Give him love," replied Marion, "the good influence and love of a good woman."

"But does he still care for me?" said Rachel in a low, thrilled tone. "It is so long since we met, and so much has happened in between."

"If you had seen his face when I told him you had never cared for Tregenna, and were not going to marry him after all, you would not doubt it. He begged me to speak to you on his behalf, and I promised to do so. I do not like to press you, to over-persuade you, Rachel; you must act as your own heart decides. But I am quite sure that if you choose you can be the saving of him, as I am sure that without you he will come to ruin. You know what he is almost as well as I do. He needs affection; he cannot be happy without it. And if he has no good woman beside him, and feels himself neglected, forsaken—he will seek others who are not good. Oh, Rachel, that boy has gone through so much! That he has lost caste a little I will not conceal from you who are my friend. But it is not too late. He is still young enough to turn over a new leaf and become everything he ought to be. Only he will never do it without your help, the reward which you alone can give him."

"There is no need," cried Rachel, "to persuade me to do what I long above all things to do! Only tell me how to set about it."

"Marry him. You will have to live abroad."

"But he has not asked me, Marion!"

"And he will not ask you—he cannot. You must ask him!"

Rachel clasped her hands round her knees in her old attitude

of thought, and rocked to and fro, her breathing quick, her great eyes fixed on Marion's face.

"I daren't, Marion!" she said. "Would you?"

"Yes—yes—yes, if I loved him!"

"I do love him. I have always loved him, and I shall never love any other man."

"Then go to him and tell him so! Oh, what an opportunity! What an atonement!" Marion's cheeks were aglow. "If I were in your place I should be wild with joy at the chance of paying Stephen's debt!"

Her enthusiasm fired the girl, and conquered her maidenly hesitation. Her face flamed too.

"Stephen's debt!" she cried. "Yes—yes, I should repay! For every hour of agony he has endured I would give him a day of happiness; for every month of discomfort a year of luxury and content; for all his miseries the devotion of my life! Oh, Marion, let me go to him now! Let me go to him!"

She fell back sobbing in the chair, and Marion embraced her.

"My darling, you shall be rewarded by happiness as great as the happiness you bestow. I knew you would be staunch to him. You cannot go to him to-night, but to-morrow will come soon. I only promised that he should hear from you within the week."

"It is such joy to know he loves me still. Does he expect me, Marion?"

"No. I dared not promise so much in your name, for fear of disappointing him. He will be delighted to see you."

"Will he think it strange of me to come?"

"He will know you come with my consent. But I will accompany you, if you like?"

"No! Why should I pretend to fear him? Why should anyone—even you—mediate between him and me? I would rather meet him alone, Marion. I would do far more to show how I love and trust him, and what sacrifices, if necessary, I would make for him. . . . Oh, I shall not sleep to-night for longing for the day! What will my mother say? And St John and Stephen?"

"St John at anyrate must know nothing till afterwards

Constance is a good woman, but—she does not understand; neither does he.”

“I am not a coward,” added the girl half fiercely, as though defying her own wildly beating heart. “I don’t care what anyone says. *You* know I am not a coward, Marion!”

“You have proved that, Heaven knows!”

“‘And forsaking all other,’” murmured Rachel, with a divine light in her wet eyes, “‘keep thee only unto him, as long as ye both shall live’!”

CHAPTER LIV

VIVIAN’S CURSE

THE approach of five o’clock found Vivian wandering about his room like a caged bear. Marion had telegraphed to him to be at home at a certain time; and would she have done so unless she had good news?

His appearance had changed considerably for the better since the day before yesterday. He looked bright, to begin with; his new clothes, too, although ready made, were a great improvement on the old ones; and now that his beard was trimmed close it suited him very well. The man was too young, in fact, to have lost his good looks utterly in a few years of adversity and social and moral deterioration. There was nothing about him this afternoon to frighten or revolt a girl who had loved him long ago. She was only likely to pity him.

Almost on the stroke of five there was a knock at the door.

“Come in,” he said, rising.

It opened slowly, and Rachel entered. For an instant he thought he had gone out of his mind, then a great choking cry broke from him:

“Rachel! Can it be you?”

“Yes,” she said. “Marion sent me. Am I welcome?”

“Good God!” he whispered, staring at her.

She held out her hands to him, as though offering herself to him, as though bidding him take her if he would.

“Won’t you tell me I am welcome?” she asked, with tears in her voice.

The man came out of his trance. He caught her hands, and gazed at her with burning eyes.

"I can scarcely believe it even yet! Welcome! Need I tell you so? *You* know, if no one else knows, how I have loved you."

"Do you love me still?"

"With all my heart and soul—since you are here! I thought you had forsaken me. I saw you with another man, and hated you. But you are here, Rachel, you are here—after so long! It is like a dream! In a little while I shall awake and you will be gone, and I shall be alone again!"

"Gone, only to return—unless you banish me! I love you. Did you think I had forgotten? Never! Whatever I have done, Vivian, my heart has always been faithful to you."

He caught her in his arms and kissed her on the lips.

"Rachel! Oh, Rachel! Marion bade me hope, but I feared to do so! How good of you to come! Such kindness disarms me—and makes me wonder more than ever why you became engaged to that man."

"Why speak of that?" she asked. "Is it not enough that I am here? If you reproach me I shall think you wish to drive me away, Vivian!"

He strained her closer still.

"I will not make another reference to the past. The sight of you has made me so happy that I am willing to forget all I can, and forgive the rest! How long it is since last I kissed you! Ah, Rachel, what miserable, heart-breaking years!"

"Have I changed?" she asked wistfully. "Have I grown old? Am I still the girl who cried when she said good-bye to you?"

"You have not changed."

"You say that to comfort me; and perhaps it is true, for I feel young to-day—new born. Yesterday I was old, so old and sad and tired. And you, Vivian?" She took his head in her hands and gazed at him tenderly. "Have you too felt old and sad and tired?"

"Ah, yes! But this moment pays me for everything—your pity, your lips, your dear presence which I have hungered for Rachel, Rachel, you know what hopes your visit must arouse in me?"

"I know."

"And you mean to fulfil them?"

"Do you imagine," she said, "that I came here to tease you? My poor Vivian, nothing was farther from my thoughts. I understood thoroughly what you would expect of me, and I am prepared to grant everything you ask."

"Everything? You would marry me?"

"Yes. Gladly."

"Oh, my dear," he said softly, enraptured, and he bent his head and kissed her hands. "You are even more adorable than you used to be. And you love me—after all, you love me well enough for this! Your trust shall not be betrayed, be sure of that. As I deal with you, may God deal with me!"

"I believe you," she said. "You are the old Vivian still. I expected to find you changed, to feel strange towards you; but I should have known you anywhere! It is as though we had not been separated at all."

"Has Marion told you of her generosity to me? She is going to give me all my father's money. So we shall be well off, Rachel. You will not be marrying a poor man at any rate. Whatever happens to me, your future is secured."

"Nothing will happen to you," she replied, with a catch in her voice. "We shall spend many peaceful years together."

"I can hardly believe yet that it is true," he said. "Yesterday I was alone and desperate, and to-day you are here. My darling, how can I thank you?"

"I want no thanks for pleasing myself!"

"When will you go away with me?"

"Whenever you please. Where are we going?"

"We should be less noticeable in America than elsewhere."

"Then let us go to America."

"I dare not run the risk of embarking at Liverpool," he said. "How do I know the police are not on the look out for me still? And it would be too horrible to be torn from you now! Suppose you go on board here, and I join the steamer at Naples?"

"It would be safer, no doubt."

"Could you be ready to sail next week, Rachel? I shall not

rest until we are married; I am too unlucky. And we have waited so long."

She wound her arms round his neck, and they kissed each other.

"Oh, I will repay!" she said. "I love you."

"Repay?"

"My poor victim, my martyr, you shall be so happy that all the past will seem no more to you than an evil dream! You shall forget those miserable years, and we will pick up the threads of our lives where we dropped it in the Cave that day!"

"But another man has kissed you since then," he said jealously.

"You must not think of him, Vivian, or mention him again. If you knew how little need you had to be jealous! It was for family reasons alone I accepted him. You had disappeared. I never expected to see you again. And—I thought it did not matter what became of me."

"He has grown rich, hasn't he?" asked Vivian gloomily.

"Yes." Her eyes faltered before his. "Perhaps I was tired of being a burden upon Stephen."

"Surely he never allowed you to feel yourself a burden!"

"No. But I wanted to do something for him—and my mother and the rest," explained the girl haltingly. "They did not know why I accepted him, but in reality it was for their sakes."

"Your motive seems inadequate," he said, "but how can I complain, to-day of all days, when you are being so good to me? You love me, you are going to marry me, so I have nothing to forgive."

"I like to hear you say that!" she cried. "I want to think I am going to make you so happy that you will forgive everybody who has injured you—that you will be at peace with the whole world."

"Except the man who murdered Joe Williams," he replied. "You cannot expect me to forgive him. I have cursed him for three and a half years!"

"You have cursed him!" repeated Rachel, shrinking and paling.

"Yes; why not? I hope he may live to regret the day he was born, to fear the day and the night, God and man, life and death. Do you pity Judas? What betrayal could be crueller and more

treacherous than mine? Somewhere there must be a man who knows I am innocent, and let me be condemned in his place. Hanging is too good for such as he! He deserves to be damned in this world and the next!"

Her white lips moved, but soundlessly; she only gazed at him with anguished eyes and aching heart.

"I know we are told that we should forgive everybody," he said, "but human flesh and blood can't do it when it comes to wrongs like mine. Perhaps women can; men can't. I don't think I'm more vindictive than most men, but you, even you, can't realise what I've suffered, Rachel. The shame firstly, the consciousness of my father's dishonoured name and broken heart, the physical degradation of prison life, the biting, burning injustice of it all! And even that doesn't sum up everything I owe this cur! I am not finished—I shall never be finished—with the past. You tell me I am not changed; it is good of you to say so, dear, but I know better. The mark of the life I have led is on me. I have done things——"

"Don't tell me!" she cried, stopping her ears. "Make no confession to me. I forgive everything—everything!"

"But you *must* hear," he said hoarsely. "I am not such a blackguard even now as to deceive you. You must know what a bargain you are making, something of the man upon whom you are bestowing your life. I have drunk myself stupid; I have reeled through the streets until a hand on my collar frightened me sober. I have gambled, and spent the money I have won on bad women; I have consorted with the scum of London—outcasts like myself. It is for my lost self-respect that I hate him worst of all!"

"When your wounds are healed your bitterness will die," she said. "There is no brand upon you—no, no! not in my eyes at least; and in another land what will it matter to you that this one has misjudged you?"

"My lost self-respect," repeated Vivian. "No, I shall never forgive. And this man, whoever he is, may he lose more than I have lost, suffer more than I have suffered, and live only long enough to see all he loves wither in the shadow of his crime!"

The girl thrust him from her suddenly, with her two hands

pressed against his chest, her white lips parted, her eyes wide and wild.

"If he knew what I know!" she thought.

It poured poison into her cup of joy, and made her fear him. Hitherto she had not doubted her right to be loyal to Stephen, but her lover had presented to her the other side of the medal, and she saw for the first time with his eyes, and realised how he would regard her if he knew the truth. It was not only the man he had cursed who had cost him so dear; she had helped to betray him with her silence—she, who had professed to love him!

She felt a hypocrite, and was tormented by fresh anguish. To tell him was out of the question; but suppose he found out some day, after they were married? He would never forgive her; she was sure of that. The passion with which he had cursed his unknown enemy had cost her a thrill of superstitious dread. It showed her what trouble she would have if ever he discovered Stephen's secret, and her share in it—if ever he discovered what a choice she had made between brother and lover. He, who had never had a brother, and whose mother was merely a name to him, would be unable to realise how powerful are the bonds of blood to a woman. He would despise and hate her for the sacrifice of his honour and her own love which she had made on the altar of the Family, and she would lose him for whom, in the end, she had accepted exile.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"If some day you became sorry you took me away, what should I do?"

"Rachel, how can you imagine such a thing!"

"You don't think it possible now. But you may grow tired of me while I am growing fonder of you."

"Have I not been faithful for years?"

"Ah, we are not married yet!"

He turned up her chin and looked at her.

"You are frightened, Rachel! It is too big a step I ask of you!"

"No—no. I am going with you; I want to go with you. Only"—she was twisting a button on his coat with her thin

nervous fingers—"I wish—oh, how I wish we had been married years ago! It would have made such a difference. We should have been together always. You would have had nothing to do with that man who came to Carnruan after you, and—and—all this misery would have been averted."

"It is useless to look back," he said hoarsely. "I was a brute to harrow your feelings just now, but I thought you ought to know I hadn't been a saint—as you were placing such confidence in me. Let us be thankful that we are reunited at last, while we are young, before I have quite damned myself! After all, the future is more valuable than the past, and we are going to be married, Rachel; I have got you at last!"

His passion and warm embrace consoled her. He was happy despite the outburst which had wounded her just now; he was happy and she abandoned herself to happiness too. It was useless to look for troubles, and she had done her best.

The next day she went home to prepare secretly for her flight. Even her mother might not be taken into her confidence. It was hard, and the girl grieved over it, but she dared not tell anybody. The least hint of the step she meditated would cost her a heart-breaking scene, she knew, and perhaps the intervention of St John, resulting in danger to Vivian. She would be unable to explain why she knew her lover was innocent, and they would regard her as a monster or mad.

So she packed as for a prolonged visit to Marion, while she took a silent farewell of her mother, and Mamie and St John, whom she could not hope to see again for years.

CHAPTER LV

A FRESH MISFORTUNE

VIVIAN'S suddenly planned departure gave him a good deal to do. It was arranged that Marion should book their berths for safety's sake, but he had to get an outfit within the next few days.

The excitement of having plenty of money, and the marriage of his heart within sight at last, had its effect on his nerves, no

doubt, for he felt unduly tired when he returned to his lodgings in the evening.

"Of course, I am out of condition," he thought. "The sea voyage will pick me up. I hope to God nothing unforeseen will happen now!"

The idea of the police pouncing upon him at the eleventh hour made him feverish to be gone, and he wrote to Marion, who was coming to say good-bye to him, that he should leave the next day instead of on the date originally arranged. He could get clothes on the way south—at Paris, or Milan, or even Naples. It seemed madness to linger in England, where he was a marked man.

His head ached, and he had a bit of a sore throat, like the forerunner of a bad cold, so he went to bed early. But he felt too restless to sleep, and in the morning his head and throat were worse. A cup of tea did him a little good. He could not eat, however, and scarcely felt up to the long railway journey before him. Nevertheless, he was loath to postpone it now, he had begun to feel nervous about his safety again. Every time a board creaked he started, fearing the police. He had so much to lose. He could not believe that real happiness was in store for him at last.

He did not go out all day. It was not only that he had become suddenly afraid to show himself abroad—he did not feel equal to any exertion. He concluded he was out of sorts and had better rest while he could.

He was lying on the sofa when Marion came about five o'clock and rose languidly.

"So you have altered your plans," she said.

"Yes. I used to think London was the safest place to stay in—with this beard—but now I am anxious to get away."

She was gazing at him intently. His face was so flushed, his manner so feverish, that she thought for a moment he had been drinking.

"What is the matter with you?" she asked. "You look ill."

"I don't feel up to much," he said, "to tell you the truth. My throat is sore and my head splitting. I almost dread my journey to-night."

Her heart sank. She had not lived with Garth so long without learning something of medicine.

"Let me feel your pulse," she said. "Your hand is very hot!" His head was hot too. She looked at his throat. "Vivian, you are not in a condition to travel."

"I must," he said.

"Think of our anxiety," she urged, "if you left in this state. I am afraid you are going to be ill. You must come home with me."

"Too risky."

"Nobody will know you are in the house except the servants, who have never heard of you. I am not at Harley Street at present," she added, remembering he did not know. "I—I have work at the East End, and my headquarters are in Queen Square, Bloomsbury. I shall take you there."

He must have been really ill, for he showed no curiosity or surprise, and asked no questions, and yielded without further argument to her insistence that he should go home with her. They took a cab, and directly they reached Queen Square she bade him go to bed and sent for Garth.

As she sat by Vivian's side, waiting, she was struck by the quickness with which she fell back upon her husband in an emergency. It was not strange; it was the most natural thing in the world. He was the strongest man she knew, the most reliable to lean upon, and he was hers.

It would take the servant so long to drive to Harley Street, so long to return—if he were at home when she arrived. She calculated how soon he could come, and ticked off the minutes five at the time.

In reality no more than three quarters of an hour had passed, although it seemed much longer to her anxiety, when Garth arrived.

"Oh, Stephen, I am so glad to see you!"

He did not smile, knowing her welcome was for the physician, not the man. But he was content she should want him in any capacity, and send for him first of all when she was in trouble.

"He does not know we have separated," she whispered. "You need not tell him now."

Garth went to the bedside.

"How's this, Vivian? You are one of the last people I desired for a patient!" His voice was professionally cheerful as his keen, practised eyes surveyed the young man. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

"I'm awfully glad to see you, old fellow," said Vivian, "although this isn't a very auspicious meeting."

He put out his hand affectionately, and Garth took it and felt his pulse.

"A little feverish. How about your tongue?"

"My throat's awfully hot and dry," said Vivian.

He was speaking huskily too, and Garth noticed that the glands of his neck were slightly swollen.

"Let me look at your throat. How long have you been seedy?"

"I haven't been quite the thing for three or four days. I thought I'd got a bit of a chill or a touch of rheumatism."

"Pains, eh?" asked Garth. "And you felt chilly?"

"Yes," said Vivian. "But nothing much, you know; I didn't bother, having something else to think about. I shall be all right in the morning, sha'n't I? You don't think there's anything much the matter? But I don't know if I'm safe to stay here so long. I don't want to be caught like a rat in a trap!"

He stirred restlessly, and there was an anxious look on his face.

Garth watched him without speaking for a moment.

"Yes; I daresay you'll be all right in the morning, and able to get away. Don't worry; go to sleep. I'll look after things. Are you thirsty?"

"Awfully."

"Give him some milk, Marion."

She rang the bell, and ordered the milk, and when the servant came with it she went to the door herself and took it from the girl instead of allowing her to bring it in.

Vivian drank greedily, emptying the tumbler.

"Get him some barley water," said Garth, "and give him as much milk as he likes."

He remained for a few minutes longer with Vivian, then biddin

him try to sleep, beckoned to Marion. She followed him outside, and spoke first:

"You do not expect him to be better in the morning?"

"No. Only it was advisable to soothe him. He is feverish."

"What is it?"

"Diphtheria."

"Oh, Stephen!" She turned very pale, and gazed at him in helpless dismay.

"I will send a nurse as I go home."

"I do not want a nurse," she replied quickly. "I can manage alone."

"It is dangerous—and unnecessary. I will send you a nurse," he repeated, "who will do more for him than you can."

"Once you told me yourself," she said, "that I had a gift for nursing. Your patient will not be neglected if you leave him to me."

"I am thinking only of you in the matter," he said hoarsely, for her allusion had referred to Bobbit's illness. "As your husband, I cannot forbid anything, I suppose; as his doctor, I am in my rights."

"No, don't forbid it!" she implored. "I wish to do it, Stephen. If it would give me pleasure, why should you balk me?"

"In an illness of this kind there are necessary precautions in self-defence which the trained nurse takes as a matter of course, but which you do not understand."

"Tell me what to do and I will do it," she said. "Only allow me in this matter to have my own way."

"It seems to me," he said, with a half-impatient sigh, "that you always have your own way. However, you will want help in any case. You cannot sit up night and day!"

She yielded that point—there could be one nurse if she were the other—and he yielded his because it seemed useless to combat her resolution. Nobody knew better than he did, God help him, how determined she could be. He was very anxious about her, nevertheless. Diphtheria was not as infectious as scarlet fever or typhoid, but still he could not bear to think of her running a risk of any kind. At this time the possibility of

a system of inoculation against diphtheria was just being broached, but the discovery which was to guarantee immunity to nurses and doctors had yet to become an accomplished fact and he could do nothing to protect her beyond impressing upon her to be careful not to inhale Vivian's breath.

"You will come early?" she asked wistfully.

"Before breakfast," he replied, "otherwise, as you know, I cannot get away till midday. Nothing to alarm you is likely to occur in the night, otherwise I would offer to remain. I will send the nurse."

She accompanied him downstairs as though he were a stranger.

In the morning, as he expected, Vivian was worse. He was very feverish, and Garth, on looking into his mouth, saw a small white patch on the tonsils. The back of his mouth was swollen too, and he was very hoarse.

"How do you feel?" asked Garth quietly.

"Pretty bad. When shall I be able to get up—to-morrow?"

"You mustn't attempt it. If I let you go out it would be at the risk of your life, and I dare not permit it. You've got diphtheria."

"My God!" murmured Vivian.

"Keep up your courage. You will pull through all right."

"It is the delay," he said. "What will Rachel think? I shall be unable to join her."

Garth looked at Marion inquiringly.

"I will explain by-and-by," she said in a low tone.

She told him everything when the moment came—how she had seen Vivian, and sent Rachel to him, and assisted their preparations for flight; and the girl was his sister and the man an escaped convict, liable to rearrest at any time, but he could not complain. He of all the world could be the last to forbid the banns, and Marion knew it.

As she expected, he heard her in silence, and at the end merely observed:

"Of course, she must not sail till he is better. But do not write to her yet; I do not want her to nurse him. That you are running the risk is bad enough."

"Very well," assented Marion. "I should like to be able to

tell her only when the danger is past. Poor girl, she has suffered enough."

"Yes," he sighed; "she has suffered enough."

CHAPTER LVI

THE SACRIFICE

It was palpable enough even to Marion that Vivian was growing rapidly worse. If another man for whom she cared had been concerned she would have been anxious, naturally, but her anxiety for Vivian was tinged with a superstitious dread. He was so unlucky.

The nurse was in charge to-night, and she ought to have been resting to fit her for her turn at nursing to-morrow, but she could not rest. It was as though some of his feverish blood had been transmitted to her veins. Her wide eyes strained into the darkness as though she were trying to read God's purpose in this sudden turn of events, to find out whither the wind was drifting those for whom he cared the most.

Yes, he was unlucky; she could call it nothing else. Veritably he seemed chosen, as the scapegoat of Scripture, to bear the burden of another's crime. She had tried to help him; she had seen the way clear at last to giving him a life which would have been happiness after what he had endured in the past. But in a moment a storm had arisen, sweeping all these plans away, and casting their lives into confusion even wilder than before. Why was he stricken so repeatedly? Was there a meaning in this fresh blow—a lesson for those with eyes to read? Were these new misfortunes intended to remind her that there could be no relief without atonement—that someone must suffer for the wrong done; if not the guilty, then the scapegoat?

The night became intolerable. She rose, and threw a wrapper over her nightgown and went to Vivian's door. All was quiet within; he might be sleeping, and it would be a pity to wake him. At least he was not dead, as she had been ready to expect a moment ago, or the nurse would have come and told her.

She returned to her room, but not to her bed. She had never felt less like sleeping in her life.

She was still pacing the room when the nurse knocked softly.

"Are you awake, Mrs Garth?"

"Yes—yes!" Marion was at the door in an instant, white, wild-eyed. "What is the matter?"

"I fancied I heard you stirring, and thought you might like a cup of tea, that is all."

"I feared—I feared——" faltered Marion. She put her hand to her forehead and expelled a long, deep breath. "Thank you, nurse, I should like a cup of tea if you are making some for yourself. How is he?"

"He has had a bad night. He is coughing so much. I mustn't leave him."

They returned to his room. He noticed Marion, who went to his side, and held out a hot hand to her.

"Why aren't you asleep, Marion? What a nuisance I am being to you all!"

"No nuisance at all—except to yourself, my poor boy."

"Come nearer," he whispered. "I want to ask you something. Does the nurse know who I am?"

"No. You are Mr 'Geoffrey' to her. But if she suspects anything, she is quite safe. Stephen has known her for a long time; she will do anything for him."

The few sentences he had spoken had been punctuated by dry coughs, and his voice sounded muffled. It was evident he had great difficulty in breathing. By the time Garth arrived he could scarcely speak at all, and Marion awaited her husband's verdict anxiously.

He came out of the room looking grave.

Vivian's food at this time consisted of milk, meat juice, and ice cream to soothe his throat, nothing solid; but the next day it was with great difficulty that he could swallow even liquid nourishment. He was very restless, and his pulse was rapid and feeble. He was growing weak, too.

Garth came three times on the third day.

"The membrane in his throat is an eighth of an inch thick,"

he told Marion. "His cough dislodges it sometimes, but it grows again with marvellous rapidity."

"It seems to pain him so much to swallow that one feels cruel to force food upon him," she said, with tears in her eyes. "Yet if he does not take nourishment he will die of weakness."

"Of course, the larynx is becoming blocked," said Garth heavily. It was unnecessary for him to tell her how serious the case was when he added: "I will sleep here to-night, with your permission."

Undoubtedly Vivian was very ill. His constitution, impaired by hardships and the careless life he had been leading, was no longer what it had been, and seemed incapable of bearing any strain. He was suffocating. Weak as he had become he could find strength to sit up in bed and gasp for breath, his chest heaving, and every muscle in his body strained to its utmost to get some air into his lungs.

It was terrible to watch him; Marion could scarcely bear it. There were times when she stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, and bit on it to prevent herself from screaming. But she would not have a second nurse; she insisted upon doing half the work, painful as it had become. He was conscious, and she would not leave him. Often, between his paroxysms, he thanked her for her goodness to him, and his gratitude made her writhe. If he knew how little cause he had to be grateful!

Once Garth watched with her when Vivian was gasping for breath, his mouth open, his head thrown back.

"For God's sake do something, do something!" she cried to her husband. "I shall go mad! He is choking; he will die under our very eyes. And he must not die, he must not die; you *dare* not let him die!"

He looked at her quickly, catching the clue to her mind which that last sentence gave him.

"You *dare* not let him die!"

She would regard him as a murderer if anything happened to Vivian. He denied with passion her right to do anything of the sort; but it would be useless to argue with a woman in her mood. Indeed, what had argument—reason, he called it—availed him with her at any time? She was as blind to his

point of view as he was blind to hers. From the outset their standpoints had differed, and they grew wider apart with every fresh event which proceeded from the old.

"I am doing my best, Marion."

"You said that before the child died. What is the use of your science? It is of as little avail as my faith!"

"This is too much for you. Go out of the room," he replied in a tone of cold command, "and send the nurse to me."

"I beg your pardon, Stephen."

"Go," he repeated, "and send the nurse."

She obeyed, downcast. He was right; she was wrong. In the sick-room he was master. The taunt wrung from her by anguish had been as unjust as it was cruel.

He put a supporting arm round Vivian, and spoke to him. Tracheotomy was the only thing to give him relief, and Garth, surgeon as well as doctor, lost no time about the operation. When Marion was admitted to the room again Vivian was quiet and at ease.

She had been crying. It made Garth kinder to her than he otherwise would have been as she accompanied him downstairs.

"I am obliged to go," he said, "although much against my inclination. Other people need me. I wish you would take my advice, and let me send you another nurse?"

"You think I am hysterical, not to be trusted!" she said quickly.

"I think you are too interested in Vivian to be self-possessed with him—and just to me."

"You have a right to reproach me," she said. "It shall not happen again. Oh, Stephen, can you save him? Will this relief last?"

"I am doing my best," he said. "But it is useless to disguise from you that his condition is critical. If the tube become blocked he will suffocate in a few seconds. He must not be left for a moment, nurse knows."

"It must be a fearful death," she said, gazing before her with blank eyes.

"It is a speedy one at anyrate."

She shuddered, locking her hands.

"But the agony now, the struggle, the—the—— Oh, my God!"

"You overrate your strength," he said peremptorily. "I insist—I *insist* upon a second nurse! Nurse cannot remain on the watch day and night, and I decline to have him left alone with you. At a critical moment you would lose your head. You are in an emotional state."

"Because I pity him?"

"Don't argue, please. I shall send a nurse."

"It is my house, Stephen!"

"And I am his doctor. If you are not satisfied with me, call in somebody else!"

She almost smiled.

"Oh, how can I wrangle with you in this petty way? You are right—I *am* overwrought. He is too near to me; it means too much. Of course, it shall be as you say."

She leaned against the wall for a moment, so pale, so weary-eyed, that the man's momentary anger was lost in the fathomless well of his love for her. He longed to take her in his arms and kiss her, but she denied herself and him the consolation of unity. She would be miserable in her own way, alone.

How long would Vivian's relief last? That was the question she asked herself when Garth had gone.

"Poor Rachel—oh, poor Rachel!" she murmured.

It was so pitiable to think of that girl waiting for news in Cornwall—news which might be the worst. She had acted so bravely; was there to be no reward?

Absorbed as she was in his illness Marion had almost forgotten about the police. It did not seem to matter so much now whether they found him or not. She had no time to think of it. His life itself was threatened; everything else had become trivial in the tension of this unutterable suspense.

She knew without asking Garth that tracheotomy must be the last resource applied to a desperate case, and dreaded every moment that the hanging sword would fall. All that afternoon and the next morning, however, Vivian was easier.

The second nurse had arrived and taken the night watch. Nevertheless, Marion was constantly in and out of the room.

She thought he liked to see her there, and she was afraid to leave him in case she might never see him alive again. She had the feeling most people have—that her presence was a safeguard that he could not die while she watched him. Her whole being was in revolt against the possibility of such an ending to his troubled life. He must not, he should not die! It seemed to her that more than his life and Rachel's happiness was involved: her husband's soul. If his wrong-doing were to lead to such an end how could he absolve himself, much less obtain absolution? And, attentive as he was to Vivian, he could go about his daily work as though there were nothing the matter. How could he do it? In his place she would have been unable to stir from Vivian's bedside. The agonising suspense she endured should have been more than shared by him. Now, as ever, she marvelled at his coolness, his strength of mind. His hands never shook, his voice never faltered. If the man had been less a man, would he have been nearer salvation? His very strength was his weakness. He who was a law unto himself stood erect to face damnation, strode undaunted by any menace along the chosen path, bowing his head no more to God than to man.

What would become of him, of Vivian, of all of them?

The woman crouched in the arm-chair by the window, her eyes brooding over Vivian. He was still at ease. It was almost as great a relief to her as to him that the frightful spectacle she had witnessed was over. He soon seemed to be sleeping.

The nurse rose softly and whispered to Marion.

"I will be back in a moment. You will remain with him?"

Marion nodded. In spirit she was always alone with him. His welfare meant so much more to her than to anyone, except the girl at Carnruan. It was her place to stand between him and misfortune. Because she knew so much he was as a sacred charge to her apart from the affection she had always felt for him. If only he would recover how thankful she would be, how she would appreciate the relief of seeing him safely off on his way to America! She thought that she would be almost happy if he were well again, and out of the country and married to Rachel.

As she gazed at him he opened his eyes and looked at her. He was a brave, good-tempered invalid, poor fellow; she had never loved him so well for his own sake as since she had nursed him.

Suddenly his face changed, and he gasped. A red mist blurred Marion's sight. She sprang to his side.

"Vivian! Oh, Vivian!"

He was leaning on his elbow, his face convulsed. It was horrible.

Once more her husband's voice was in her ears:

"If the tube becomes blocked he will suffocate in a few seconds."

There was no time to call the nurse, who would be useless in any case. He would die unless——

Her mind worked with unnatural speed. All the story of his betrayal and her husband's guilt seemed to pass before her vision with lightning speed as the man on the pillow fought for his life. She knew there was only one way of saving him. . . .

CHAPTER LVII

WHAT WOULD IT COST HER?

HER first feeling after the deed was done was that of exhilaration. A fainting fit followed.

Garth arrived just as she was regaining consciousness, and she looked at him from the couch where they had placed her with a fathomless expression in her eyes.

"What is the matter?" he asked the nurse anxiously. "She never faints!"

The woman turned away, afraid to answer, and Marion spoke for herself.

"He was choking, and I saved him."

"What do you mean?"

"I sucked the tube," she whispered.

Garth turned ashy grey. He could not speak. It was one of those supreme moments when a man is tongue-tied, face to face

with the inevitable, with God. His forehead was wet, she saw glisten; his white lips quivered.

"Marion!"

"Don't grieve for me," she said. "I knew what I was doing. I wanted to do it."

"Did you know what it might cost you?"

"Yes—quite well," she said. "It doesn't matter."

"I should have forbidden you to go into his room at all!" he said. "I was not firm enough. I ought to have known you were not to be trusted——"

"Don't be angry," she said, turning her face away.

"Angry!" he said, his hand across his forehead. "My anger is only regret for the danger you have incurred. It is noble. But what madness!"

"I feel quite well," she said. "I was only—only a little over-excited. I am very healthy and strong, as you know. It will not hurt me. Many doctors have done it, and suffered no ill effects: you told me so yourself."

"Did I?" he asked absently. "Yes, it is true that it has been done."

She sat up.

"Go to Vivian; do not stay with me; I am not your patient. She smiled a little faintly. "I feel so pleased with myself that I am in better spirits than I have been for years. It is not everybody who would have had the presence of mind, is it? You said I had lost mine, yesterday; but you were wrong, you see!"

Her note of innocent triumph and exultation drove him mad. He rose.

"I could have wished you had had less presence of mind of that kind!"

He went to Vivian's room, performing a duty which had suddenly become distasteful. His brain was on fire, he saw blood. She would not have said that his hand was firm now. A cataclysm had occurred as terrible as it was unforeseen. She might pull through—she *might*, but she had risked her life for this man, and the other man who was her husband hated him. That she had always felt a deep affection for Vivian he was

aware ; it was only natural, brought up together as they had been. But even a sister does not perform such a sacrifice for a brother. She could not have realised the seriousness of what she was doing, or she must have relied on the splendid vitality which had borne her safely through so much.

"One can imagine a woman doing such a thing for a lover," he thought, "the one love of her life! But for a mere kinsman——!"

Her splendid Quixotic heroism aroused him to rage rather than admiration. He cared too much for her and too little for Vivian to be able to regard her conduct from the spectacular point of view. To his sickening anxiety she had committed a folly for which he could scarcely forgive her. Surely even to her own meekness her life must be at least as valuable as that of a broken man like Vivian? It was false modesty to rate him higher than herself. She had had no right to do it. He felt robbed—as though she had given away what was not hers to give—the life she had vowed to him at the altar of Carnruan church.

Yet what was her husband to her that she should consider him if she did not consider herself? Garth ground his teeth over the question his own brain raised. He was no more than a name to her to-day—a name around which the sentiment of a departed tenderness clung like the scent of faded flowers—a name which reviving memories made her fancy in her softest moments that she still loved.

It was thus that he analysed the living passion she only conquered as an evil thing by prayer! He could not read her mind or see the heart she hid from him; words told him nothing, while the deeds which would have told him so much were absent. She could not make him believe it was real love she felt for him while she refused him a husband's rights.

The man whom he had regarded formerly with a mingling of pity and contempt, whose illness had struck the chord of suffering humanity to which the doctor was never deaf, had become, by this act of hers, what he had never been—an enemy. Lying there enfeebled, helpless, so little in this world that a finger-tip could suffocate him, he had contrived to play the vampire's part by his appeal to the woman's feelings. That he had never begged

for the succour given did not earn his pardon from Garth. She had risked her life to preserve his life. Why had he not died yesterday! Why had he ever existed at all!

Vivian was asleep, and Garth gazed at him sombrely. The unconscious scapegoat had had his revenge. It was as though a child who had been ill-used had suddenly developed a giant strength in order to punish his oppressors. Garth had used him as a workman uses his tool, as a sculptor moulds clay, fashioning his own fame out of worthless stuff. Vivian had never been more to him than a pawn which is moved about on the chess-board having neither volition of his own nor the consciousness of the player's hand. And yet, through his mere existence, unsuspecting, well intentioned as he was, he had contrived to strike back at the man who had injured him, and strike to the heart!

He would probably recover now.

Garth left him to the nurse, and went downstairs to send a message to Harley Street that he would not be home that night. Afterwards he stood hesitating. He was not a coward, but never fear gripped the heart of a man it gripped his now. He was afraid to go back to Marion, in case he should see the beginning of the symptoms he dreaded. She appeared all right, however, when he rejoined her, and smiled at him with a little bravado.

"You see I am very well!"

"Nevertheless," he replied gravely, "I have taken the liberty of sending word home that I shall be away until to-morrow."

"Are you trying to frighten me?" she asked, the smile becoming a little uncertain.

"God forbid! Only—I should feel more comfortable if I had you under my eyes for the next day or two."

"It is rather curious—your being here," she said, with a gleam of humour. "Does it strike you? I wonder what the nurses and the servants think?"

"Surely it is of little consequence!"

"I allude to you as 'Dr Garth,' and you to me as 'Mrs Garth.' You might be only a relative, of course," she added reflectively. "my cousin, for instance, or my husband's brother!"

Her unusual triviality amazed and irritated him. It was as

though a child were prattling on the Last Day. Was the mood a natural sequel to a state of exaltation, or assumed to conceal an anxiety she would not admit even to herself?

He had a few consultations, which he could not postpone, to attend in the afternoon, and his hospitals to visit. Hard as it was to leave her, he knew she would be better alone for a while. It would only make her think about herself to have him watching her. If she passed the first twenty-four hours safely there would be nothing to fear. Her seizure would be rapid, if at all.

As he drove about from place to place that afternoon he was reminded of the time of Bobbit's illness, only his own feelings to-day told him, if he had needed telling, how much more the mother was to him than the child had ever been. Deeply as he had loved the boy, parental affection could never fill his heart as this woman filled it, who had given him the greatest happiness and the deepest misery of his life.

When his horses' heads were turned to Queen's Square again, at last, suspense had become almost unbearable. He hurried into the house.

"Where is your mistress?" he asked the servant hoarsely.

"In the drawing-room, sir. I've just taken up the tea."

He found her sitting before the table listlessly, as though she had forgotten it was there.

"I did not expect you back so soon," she said.

"How do you feel, Marion?"

"Oh, very well," she said. "Will you have some tea?"

She looked pale and languid; her tone was fretfully resentful of his inquiry after her health. She seemed restless, fidgeting with the things on the tray in a way unlike her usual grave repose.

Garth noticed everything with an unspeakable sinking of the heart—such little symptoms, but pregnant of so much!

He tried to persuade himself they were only the natural aftermath of a state of great mental exaltation. It was only normal, too, that her fainting fit should leave her a little white-faced and unstrung for the rest of the day. Perhaps she would be all right to-morrow. The thing she had done had been done by some people with impunity. A case had come under his own

notice quite lately in which an hospital student had risked his life in the same way to save a child, and had been none the worse for his heroic devotion. As she said, she had a splendid constitution, and had never had a serious illness in her life except the nervous prostration from which she had suffered after Bobbit's death.

He was always observant of the people around him; his naturally acute perceptive powers, refined to their utmost by constant practice, often found symptoms of disease in those who were quite unconscious of it themselves, and he watched her although she was unaware of it, with a narrowness which lost no sign, however trivial, which analysed her every gesture—the least shadow passing across her face.

He went up to see Vivian, and when he came down again they talked a little about the new hospital, which was to be opened in a day or two, while he drank his tea. His enunciation was as deliberate as ever; he ate a slice of bread and butter and asked for a second cup of tea.

"I should have gone to the opening ceremony if it were not for Vivian," she said. "If you give a good report of him to-morrow I may venture out. I suppose there will be a great crowd?"

"Let me send you a ticket," he said.

"No; that would be too ridiculous! I should meet a number of people I knew."

"And then?"

"And then! Why, everybody must know by this time that we are separated," she replied impatiently. "How could I be seen at the same public affair as you? . . . They do know, don't they?"

"I suppose so. I have simply said that you are 'away.'"

"What would they think if they saw you taking tea with me here, I wonder? How—queer—it—all—is."

She was looking at him meditatively; he was looking at her gravely. She laughed a little, meeting his eyes—a laugh without mirth, which ended vacantly, and brushed a crumb off her lap.

"I wonder when Vivian will be convalescent?"

"You have become sanguine suddenly."

"Of course—of course he will get better now!" she said vehemently. "He must! It would be too hard if—if it were done in vain."

Garth's eyes drooped; he stirred his tea.

"He is better this afternoon. If there is no relapse he will recover."

"Ah! Why did you not tell me so at once? Why did you keep it from me?"

"My dear Marion, I have only just seen him."

"You have been sitting here a quarter of an hour! You only said 'Better' when you came down in answer to my inquiry. You are not glad!"

"Why should you say so?"

"You are not glad!" she repeated.

"I should have been more so, I confess, if you had not run such a risk on his behalf."

"But you see I am quite well," she retorted fretfully. "Why do you keep harping upon that string? It is absurd! I don't know why you didn't go home. I am sure you must be upsetting all your arrangements on my account, and it is not at all necessary."

It was like a nightmare—her impatience, her pallor, her whole manner, so unlike herself.

"I will see Vivian through the day, then," he replied quietly, "and go home to sleep, as you do not need me."

"Yes—stay with Vivian," she said, as though relieved by the suggestion, which implied that his anxiety was not on her account.

So he remained, and they went on conversing desultorily about anything but themselves, both going up at intervals to look at Vivian. It seemed an effort to her to talk, and the silent intervals were frequent. Her pallor increased towards the evening, and she was evidently struggling with a lassitude which she refused to acknowledge, and scarcely touched her dinner.

At nine o'clock Garth suggested she should go to bed.

"You have had so many disturbed nights," he said, "and now that your anxiety is relieved I am sure you must feel tired."

"Yes, of course," she said with a certain eagerness. "I have had very little sleep lately. I am a little tired."

"I shall wait and read a while if you don't mind," he said.
"Just to see how he is at midnight. Sleep well—my dear."

Her throat quivered, and her eyes filled. The hesitating endearment affected her oddly—because she was feeling so tired perhaps.

"Good-night," she said, and held out her hand to him.

He hesitated to take it, as though she were exacting a token of friendship from him which she did not deserve, then almost snatched it, and held it close between his own.

"How you wring my heart, Marion!"

"It's your own fault," she retorted, "your own fault."

"No; it is yours. Ah, well, I won't argue with you to-night," he added, with a short, sharp sigh.

After she had gone he put aside the book he had made a pretence of reading, and began to pace the room. It was not for Vivian's sake he lingered; he could not tear himself away from her. He did not like that pallor, that languor, that irritability of the nerves, although it might be harmless.

He ran his hand through his hair, and glanced at his reflection in the glass. He too looked bad, almost as bad as she did, with his haggard expression and sunken eyes. What more natural after all, than that a woman should show some tendency to collapse after such a performance?

"My anxiety is making me imaginative," he told himself.
"So far I have no real reason to say that she does not seem well."

Only he knew it was too soon to expect distinct symptoms. It was general blood poisoning which he feared for her, and the disease would develop in about twenty-four hours if at all.

Should he remain? He debated the point wearily with himself. She expected him to go home; she had almost dismissed him; and it was probably useless to remain. Nevertheless, it seemed a cold, indifferent sort of thing to do to leave her, and God knows how far from indifferent he felt! If she did happen to want him, and he was not there, he would never be able to forgive himself.

Sleep was impossible in any case, and he would just as soon stay up all night, but in the end, because he had forced himself

into certain habits of regularity for his health's sake, he rang and told the maid he would sleep there if there were a room ready for him. He told the nurse on duty too, in case he should be wanted.

It was a long, dreary night. He could not shake off his dread concerning Marion. She might almost as well have committed suicide! He dared not hope she would escape the consequences. Her constitution was in her favour, but was she as strong as she used to be? There is nothing like worry and anxiety to impair strength; the body is so dependent upon the mind. And she had been over-exerting herself with this nursing. She was run down—she must have been—when she took this risk upon herself.

His pillow was full of thorns. For hours he tossed to and fro, his brain in a ferment, torturing himself with probabilities and anticipating what he would feel if the worst came true. If she lived they would remain as they were, no doubt, but none the more on that account could he bear to contemplate her death. When he fell asleep at last it was only to start awake with the idea that someone was knocking at the door.

It really happened in the morning. He had overslept himself, and it was eight o'clock—a late hour for him—when the servant called him.

"Oh, please, sir, are you getting up?" she asked. "Missus is very bad, and would like to see you."

"I will be with her in two minutes," said Garth, and began to throw on his clothes.

It was the waking nightmare realised.

He had the feeling, which so many people experience, that he had gone through similar sensations before. It was familiar, this sickening anxiety, this overwhelming depression; the very words the servant had used and the tone of her voice came to him as from the past. He seemed to know exactly how Marion would look and what she would say when he saw her.

The room was darkened, and she was lying on the pillows with white cheeks and lowered lids.

"Oh, Stephen, I feel so sick," she said, and gave him her hand. He held it fast.

"What else?"

"And my head aches."

As she spoke a convulsive shiver ran through her body.

"Has that happened before?" he asked.

"Once. Am I going to be ill?"

"I hope not," he responded carefully.

Her head rolled on the pillow, and her voice was hoarse.

"How is Vivian this morning?"

"I haven't seen him yet."

"Go and see him."

He obeyed, and returned almost instantly.

"He is going on very well."

"I am so glad," she murmured.

One of the nurses entered, and set about carrying out the instructions given her. A kettle was put on a spirit lamp to steam in order that the air of the room might be kept moist. Not content with that, Garth rigged up an open tent over the bed by stretching a sheet across the top of four broom handles, and caused the steam to pass into it by means of a funnel, hastily procured.

When that was done he sat beside her, and waited. The nurse had softly left husband and wife alone.

Her face was almost as white as the pillow. It looked so familiar, and yet so strange, to see it resting there.

The only woman he had ever loved! His lips stooped, quivering, to the hand lying so lax upon the quilt. She flushed a little, and faintly smiled.

"You are anxious about me! Don't worry. Is it not time you went home?"

"I am taking a holiday to-day," said Garth.

A holiday, God help him!

He was fighting the Reaper for her—fighting with set teeth, and every muscle braced, and an intolerable agony of mind, in which rebellion mingled with despair.

He did not leave her all the morning. At moments she seemed to improve, or he deluded himself into thinking so; at other times he saw, with a painful clarity of perception which his anxiety sharpened rather than dimmed, how quickly she was growing worse.

By the afternoon her pulse had become weak and rapid. She asked after Vivian occasionally, but appeared drowsy and disinclined to talk. The hand he held was cold and clammy, and her pale face wore a peculiar expression of anxiety which made the man's heart sink.

He watched her through the night as through the day, tending her with a passionate patience and devotion. She was too ill by this time to make any pretence of keeping up the estrangement which had existed between them, and accepted his guardianship without protest. He fancied, indeed, that she was glad to have him there.

"You are very good to me," she murmured once.

"Who should take care of you if not I?" he answered huskily.

"Ah, Marion, would that you had admitted my right to do so earlier!"

"I regret nothing that I have done," she said.

Towards morning she sank into a state between apathy and sleep.

Garth's eyeballs burned with the strain of continual watching, his head burned with the strain of continual thinking; every breath he drew was a pang to his heart. If she had been anyone else he would have made up his mind by this time that there was no hope for her, but he would not admit it. She should not die. He sat at bay beside her, defying death. He had saved so many others, it was impossible that he should be powerless with her. The science he had made his god, his knowledge, for which he had paid so high a price, were they not strong enough to keep this one woman in the world?

He leaned his throbbing brow on his hand.

"The child and her. Must I fail with both? It shall not be!"

Yet there was nothing more to be done than he was doing, and she grew worse—she grew worse. He saw her dying before his eyes all that night and the day which followed, and as she faded Vivian throve.

"Like a parasite," thought Garth, "killing the plant which nourishes it!"

She weakened with alarming rapidity, and as her strength

went the drowsiness increased. He was afraid she would pass into a state of coma, and die insensible, but she retained consciousness, answering him when he spoke, opening her eyes when he touched her.

It was all so rapid. He had expected that. The disease she had was usually fatal in three or four days. A doctor had actually died within forty-eight hours of the same thing, and nearly fifty-six hours had elapsed since she had sucked the tube. Unless she took a favourable turn it was unlikely that she had more than a few hours to live.

Garth's hair was wet. He gazed at her, gnawing his lips, and digging his nails into his palms as though the spell of his eyes would hold her to him—the magnetism of the iron will which had withstood her pleas so long, the mere physical passion of the man who had torn his own heart from his breast and trampled on it rather than give way in a matter upon which he had refused to estimate her judgment above his own.

From the habit of convention rather than any hope of help, he sent for a colleague, who came, and went, and pitied him. There was nothing to be done; the verdict was only in accordance with his own knowledge, with the presentiment which had fallen over him like a shadow when he entered that morning to find her faint and white and exalted on the couch. Did she know? She had never asked him any questions about herself since she was first taken ill, but he thought she knew. She seemed forcing herself to gaze at him sometimes, despite the overwhelming drowsiness of exhaustion, as though she were saying good-bye. He could not bear to meet her eyes, yet directly they were turned away he felt that he had lost something he might never possess again: the regard of consciousness from the woman he loved.

The afternoon passed so quickly. He would have held time back with both hands. Her prostration appalled him; the symptoms he dreaded brought the sweat to his face. He had eaten nothing all day; for two nights he had scarcely slept; but he was not aware of hunger or fatigue. She was dying, and every moment was precious. He would not have left her if the Hosts of Heaven had summoned him away.

Suddenly she called him. That too was as familiar as the rest: the rapt expression of the waxen face, her hand on his neck as he knelt at the bedside.

"Stephen," she said, "I must say good-bye to you. It is coming. I can feel it coming. You mustn't mind. I am not afraid. And, after all, we were miserable."

"My God, why did you do it!" he cried. "You were mine! . . . To kill yourself for Vivian Carew!"

"Not for him—for you; I did it for you!" Her voice sobbed; she thrilled in his arms, her failing body animated by the spirit of a passion beatified. "Because I loved you I saved him; because you were more to me than all the world, I gave my body to save your soul! You cost him so much. Your atonement, which you would not buy, I bought for you. It was cheaply done if God would only take from my hands the price of your absolution!"

"You sacrificed yourself for me!" He was mad. "*This* is the love of a woman I called cold! It was my place to sacrifice, mine to make atonement, only mine! God, to begin again, to have the chance again! There is nothing I would not do for you!"

"Nothing?" she queried.

"Nothing! Shall I be less just to you than you have been generous to me, and deny you what is yours, all yours, my wife—my broken heart, my ruined life?"

She rose then, like a white flame which leaps flickering to an end, and wound her arms round his neck, in her eyes the light of a wild, unearthly joy.

"At last! At last! Stephen, my husband!"

"I grant you in death what I refused you in life," said the man.

"Then shall we meet again!" she said. "Kiss me!"

As their lips met she died, smiling.

CHAPTER LVIII

THE KEY OF THE GOLDEN GATE

It was morning when Garth woke from the sleep of exhaustion.

"She is dead!" was his first thought. "She is dead!"

It was scarcely credible. She had been so much to him, even in their division, that it seemed impossible he should be still alive when she was dead. The universe felt empty; his body was as heavy as though its animating spirit—the vital spark she called his soul—had gone with hers last night on the long journey to the unknown. The pain of the conflict they had fought to so pitiful an end had broken him at last. Hers was the victory, as hers had been the sacrifice. He had called her self-righteous, cold; he had called her agonising conscience a woman's sentiment, and she had died for him! The hand of the man who loved her placed the martyr's crown upon her brow. Was she right after all? Did she know? Had hers been the clear sight from the beginning, and his the blindness of intellectual pride? He had made an idol of his brain and worshipped it, and sacrificed to it—yes, all his better, gentler self, and her.

What was the gain to place beside the loss? His gift—the gift of his science to humanity. But had it been too dearly bought? Was a man justified in doing evil that good may come? Her negative had always been unhesitating, emphatic; and did it not seem that there was an offended God speaking with no uncertain voice? He had made himself amenable to no law except his own; he had reached his success by trampling on the weak; and what was the result? The curse had fallen upon those he loved. His child had died of the very disease he had undertaken to cure: Marion, Rachel, Vivian, Colonel Carew—all those who loved him or had been his friends—had helped to pay the price of his sin.

He remembered that day on the sands at Carnruan when Bobbit was ill, and the simile of his own life that he had discovered in the widening circles caused by the stone cast into the pool. Cause and effect! When he had concealed his father's death from prudence, how little he had foreseen whither his silence would lead him; when he had allowed Vivian to bear the brunt of a false accusation, how little he had foreseen the many lives which the injustice would overcast! Was it selfishness after all which had been the mainspring of his conduct—an egotism none the less real because it was dictated by a loftier motive than cowardice or ambition?

"Yes, egotism and vanity," said the man who had seen a woman die for him. "I would not admit that another might achieve what I have achieved. I elected to be the benefactor of humanity at any cost."

The undoubted good he had done now seemed as trivial in his eyes as the evil used to do. That lurid moment of her death had seared his soul as with the flames of hell, and converted the man of little faith. Every action good or bad was but a link in an endless chain of endless consequences. He had always recognised this law of consequences for other men, but he had taken his stand above the mass. He had made a god of himself, and there was but one God.

"I grant you in death what I refused you in life," he had cried in the frenzy of farewell, and the swift response of her faith had promised him: "Then shall we meet again!"

To meet again. If it were but true! His part at anyrate should be well played. He was hers. She had bought him with her sublime passion, her glorious death. Until he paid the debt he owed her, would she rest? Would not her forlorn soul wander watching and waiting for his?

He was in a fever to have done with the pretence, the sham, the giant hypocrisy of his life. He had never been honest even with himself, or when his discovery was given to the world he would have been glad to acknowledge that his work was over and the hour of justice come. Instead he had found fresh excuses for silence, fresh reasons why it was impossible to clear the name of the man whose only crime was having been his friend. He had cheated himself and broken the heart of the best woman who had ever lived, and now she was dead, and the atonement he had promised her had become his only hope, and the only link between them.

They had not wakened him, and it was already noon. Yesterday he had held her hand as he watched the sunlight stealing through the blind. Where was she now? The theory of an after life had always struck him as fantastic, crude. But somehow he could not believe that she was really dead—that the fair, white body he had clasped in a madman's arms last night was all that was left of her. Somewhere she must be

waiting, surely—waiting for him to fulfil the promise he had made?

He had been sleeping in his clothes all night. He plunged his head in water now, and it cooled the fever in his veins. He knew that he was not himself—that many of the thoughts and ideas which beset him now would seem wild to-morrow, next week, next year. A shock, three days of agony, cannot change a materialist into a dreamer, an agnostic into a priest. But he knew also that he would never rest until he had kept the vow he had made her as she lay dying, and that, if the reward she had promised him in return were no more than a dream, he would give up the worldly place he had fought so hard to win—his name, his life, if need be, for that dream's sake—for that ten minutes in as many months or years in which he could persuade himself that her words were true.

The indifference he had felt towards Vivian during her illness gave way to a burning interest. It would be a strange confession; still, he had no fear. It was not to Vivian that he would humble himself, but to justice and to her. It was not Vivian's pardon that he craved, Vivian's name that he wished to clear. The man himself, the man he had injured—and despised as he injured—was nothing. But Vivian held his passport to peace, the one key of the Golden Gate where she stood beckoning.

Every moment of delay seemed waste of time. He went to Vivian's door. It stood ajar, and the nurse on duty motioned to him with her finger on her lip. Vivian was asleep with his face upturned, and his hands lying clenched upon the quilt.

"How long has he slept?" asked Garth.

"Some hours," replied the nurse.

"Go," said the man. "I will stay with him."

The woman's eyes rested on him with deep compassion.

"I am sure you are not fit to do any more nursing, sir."

Her look and manner reminded him that they all knew by this time that Marion was his wife.

"I wish to stay with him alone," said Garth gently. "If he wants anything I will call you. Please go."

She obeyed reluctantly, and he sank into the arm-chair she had left. What changes a few days had wrought! If anyone had

told him only a week ago that he would ever be anxious to confess, that it should come to seem the one thing worth living for, the thing of most consequence in the world! How her death had cast him down from his pedestal, and dashed him to pieces at her dead feet! Those little sops to his conscience—his charities, hard work, and sympathy with all except the one man to whom he owed it most—how trivial they all seemed now!

His eyes fixed themselves on Vivian with a sort of hunger. To speak and get it over, what relief! It was a temptation to wake the sleeper, whose unconsciousness had lasted so long.

"Vivian," he whispered.

Vivian stirred and caught his breath.

Garth rose and bent over him.

"Vivian."

This time he woke with a startled expression on his face, and gazed at the other man.

"Is it you?" he asked in a husky whisper. "I thought it was Marion calling me."

"You were dreaming," said Garth harshly.

"Yes; dreaming of her. Where is she? It seems a long time since I saw her."

"And it may be a long time before you see her again," said Garth. "She is dead."

Afterwards his own brutality amazed him: that he, a doctor, should have told a man as ill as Vivian such news so suddenly! But his own voice sounded a long way off, as though it belonged to somebody else; perhaps he did not know what he was saying.

"Dead!" said Vivian, speaking with a great effort. "Marion dead! But when—how?"

"Don't you know she saved your life?" asked Garth in the same even tone. "It killed her. She died last night."

"For my sake! Oh, my God! How you must hate me!"

"You need not reproach yourself," said Garth. "She threw her life away for me—not you. With her last breath she told me so."

"I don't understand," said Vivian.

He seemed to be breathing with great difficulty. His voice

was thick and scarcely audible, and the veins on his forehead swollen.

"She considered, you see," said Garth, "that your illness, like all the rest of your misfortunes, proceeded from me, therefore that she—— Ah!"

Vivian coughed. It was a repetition of the death struggle Marion had witnessed. He sat up, clutching the bedclothes with both hands, fighting for air. His throat had closed again in the night while Marion died. It was the end.

Garth saw it, stupefied; then the blood rushed to his face, and he grasped the dying man in his arms in a frenzy: it was his passport which was slipping from him, the key to the Golden Gate!

"Not yet, not yet! Listen! Do you hear me?"

Vivian fell forward limply on the shoulder where Marion had died.

"Do you hear me? I was the man!"

But he had confessed to the dead. Vivian did not speak again.

CHAPTER LIX

BACK TO CARNRUAN

In a little while Garth wrote briefly to Rachel, and told her that Vivian was ill—very ill. He was trying to break the news to her gently. When he calculated that she would have received the letter he wired: "I am coming down to Carnruan. Meet the 4.50 express.—Stephen."

She would guess that he brought bad news—that he would not leave Vivian while anything could be done for him. Perhaps it would have been kinder to tell her outright, instead of keeping her in suspense, but Garth was incapable of giving much thought to the question. His brain was numbed, and when he found her on the platform at Craddoc his face told her just half of his bad news.

"Vivian is dead!" she said at once.

"Yes. He was dead when I sent you the last telegram."

"I am not surprised."

Her voice was level, monotonous ; she did not cry. She had passed the stage of tears, and the brother and sister gazed at each other with dry, terrible eyes.

"We shall never be happy, you and I," she added. "Perhaps it is because we two were nearer to each other than the rest, Stephen, that it has come to be my part to share the wrath which you have drawn down from God upon your head. We are accursed."

"Yes," he said hollowly. "We are accursed."

"Can we bury him at Carnruan?"

"I have given orders that he is to be brought here—and her. I do not think the police will interfere."

"And her?" repeated Rachel, catching at the two little words.

"What do you mean?"

"Marion is dead too."

Her heart gave a bound. But she did not believe it. She thought he was out of his mind.

"Oh, you are mad!" she said, staring at him. "How can Marion be dead? She was quite well a few days ago when I left her."

"She tried to save him and it killed her. He was choking, you know, and she sucked the tube."

"Then it is true?" The girl passed her hand across her forehead. "It seems as though there were no one left, doesn't it?"

"Yes ; my victims have succumbed and left me," he said, "and what I have to do will be done too late."

"What have you to do?"

"I was telling him the truth when he died," he said wearily. "I am sorry he did not hear."

"You will not confess now—now that he is dead?"

"It was never a question of him, but of her," he answered.

"I am sorry he did not hear."

She gazed at him still, with a peculiar expression in her dull eyes, on her parted lips.

"How strange you are, Stephen!"

"Am I? I should have thought *you* at least would understand!"

"Perhaps I do," she responded drearily. "You loved her and she was dying. I am glad you are going to keep your word. It is like the old Stephen I used to know."

"No," he said. "The old Stephen would have held his tongue. He died with her."

"I suppose you know what you are doing," she said. "I can't think. My head feels tired inside."

Garth went on to Poldinnick after seeing his mother and Mamie. He preferred to be alone, and Rachel, who knew his mood, did not press him to remain with them.

The news of Marion's death and Vivian's death created a sensation in Carnruan. Everybody knew within twenty-four hours, and St John, who had been spending a couple of days with Constance at Porthminster, returned home post-haste. He pressed his brother's hand with deep affection even before he kissed Rachel. Stephen had lost a wife to whom it was evident he had become reconciled before the end; Rachel, according to his view, had lost no more in Vivian than the sinking of the wreck of what had once been the man she loved.

But St John, prepared to be sympathetic, found his brother silent, and obviously disinclined to talk at all. It was like Stephen to shut himself up in his shell when he was hurt the most, and St John, who had been Stephen's brother before he had become the husband of Constance, restrained his genuine conventional expressions of regret. Stephen's grief, he perceived, was too deep to be reached by words. And yet he had been living apart from his wife! It was very puzzling. He wondered how Constance would account for it. She could usually account for everything, and mentally he rehearsed the description she would expect on his return of the manner in which Stephen bore his loss. St John himself looked remarkably well. The pale, drawn faces of his brother and sister, indeed, made him feel ashamed of himself, as though his clear, bright eyes, and his satisfaction with the world and his place in it, which was difficult to conceal despite his sincere sorrow at Marion's death, was an insult to Stephen.

Marion was to be buried beside her child at Carnruan, and Vivian in the family vault. The double funeral was arranged

take place the next day, and the police, out of consideration for Dr Garth perhaps, showed no inclination to interfere. The escaped convict had escaped so successfully at last that it was useless to put forward any claim to him.

As Garth entered the old Norman hall of Poldinnick, with its stone walls and pillars, and narrow windows looking so far across the bleak land and sea, he remembered how Marion had shivered suddenly on their last visit there, and compared the home of her childhood to a vault peopled with the ghosts of the dead. And now she was dead who had been warm with youth and womanhood, and her life had been thrown away. The grim humour, the maddening pity of it all! He was glad that she had never been asked to smile at the futility of her sacrifice, that he had not been obliged to tell her that her devotion was unrewarded even by the pitiful reward she claimed. If he had been less sincere he would have seized upon Vivian's death as an excuse for remaining silent. But he meant to keep his word. That Vivian would not benefit by his confession was no more to him than that she would have regretted it so much.

St John felt that his brother did not want him for once, and soon took his leave.

"I shall see you in the morning," he said, in allusion to the melancholy duties before him.

"Yes." Garth looked up with the first spark of animation he had shown. "Marion's lawyer will be down for the funeral and the reading of the will. Will you ask Constance to come, and mother and Rachel? I shall have something to say to you all."

CHAPTER LX

"THE TIME OF JUSTICE"

CONSTANCE, who had shed tears at the funeral, found Stephen Garth's self-possession strange in the extreme. Even his mother wondered. His manner was cold, almost hard. His face resembled a mask, across which no flicker of emotion passed even when they lowered his wife into her grave. He spoke to no one,

sought no one's eyes. He stood like a rock throughout the heartrending ceremonies, while the young vicar's voice faltered and broke, and the women sobbed.

When it was over they all returned to Poldinnick, and St John made them drink a glass of wine each. Only Stephen refused his brother's kindly insistence. Nothing had passed his lips since yesterday. He seemed to be fasting.

"If you are ready," he said, "we will hear the will read."

They trooped to the library. It was not so long ago since some of them had gathered there for the reading of the Colonel's will.

It was like Marion to have left all her affairs in order. Her bequests were simple. She had willed her late uncle's property to her dearly loved cousin, Vivian Carew, and her own fortune to her husband, with legacies of two thousand pounds to Mamie, one thousand to St John, and five thousand to Rachel. Her husband was appointed executor, and co-trustee with Rachel on Vivian's behalf. In the event of Vivian's predeceasing her unmarried, the whole of the property she had intended for him was to devolve upon her to whom he would have left it if he had lived long enough to make her his wife—his fiancée, Rachel Garth.

A half-stifled exclamation broke from Rachel at this point, but no colour came to her cheeks.

"What did you say was the date of the will?" politely inquired the young vicar.

"It is dated within a few days of her death, you see," replied the lawyer, showing him the document.

"Then," stammered St John, looking at Rachel, "then—am I to understand that this unsuspected relationship really existed so recently between you and Vivian Carew?"

"You are to understand it," replied Rachel calmly.

"You really saw this unfortunate man lately?"

"Yes," replied the girl. "I loved him. Please don't say anything unkind. I should have married him if he had lived."

"Is it likely," said St John, flushed and solemn, "that I should speak unkindly of the dead, whoever he may be, and whatever guilt may rest upon his unhappy soul? Although I may disapprove of the lengths to which you allowed your affection for

him to carry you, I pray with all my heart that he died in a state of penitence, and that God in His infinite goodness may have mercy on his soul!"

Into Rachel's hopeless eyes flashed the fire of resentment and scorn.

"Pray for your own soul, St John! If every man had done as little harm under such great provocation as he, your office would be a sinecure!"

"I can only hope," said St John, in a tone of gentleness which did credit to his training and self-command, "that your sweet confidence in him was justified, my sister; anyhow, I will not argue with you on that point to-day or any day. He is dead. May he rest in peace."

Garth, who had been listening gravely, rose at this moment. The lawyer began to take his leave, and, accepting his departure as a sign of dismissal, the few old tenants of the Poldinnick estate, who had been remembered in Marion's will, retreated to partake of the refreshments awaiting them in the housekeeper's room.

Constance rose also, signing to St John. She was touched by Marion's legacy to her husband: a thousand pounds is useful, especially when an infant son has just arrived upon this stage of life, but she could not—no, she could not approve of Rachel's conduct. To be merciful is one thing, to condone a crime another, and the idea of a nice-minded, well-brought-up girl, St John's sister, contemplating marriage with a man who was probably a murderer, made her shudder. But then, as she told herself, there had always been something about Rachel which she could not understand. She had suddenly found the phrase which described her sister-in-law: Rachel was un-English, too passionate, too undisciplined despite her careful education. One could imagine a foreign woman, Italian or Spanish, behaving in such an exaggerated, indecorous way, but not an English girl of good family with a really charming mother like Mrs Garth.

"Please wait," said Garth, raising his hand. "I have something to tell you all now that the strangers have gone."

He had scarcely spoken hitherto, and his firm, ringing voice arrested the attention of everyone in the room. His mother and Mamie looked at him in surprise, Constance sank back in her

chair again and glanced at St John for an explanation which he could not give. Only Rachel understood, and she was silent, regarding Stephen with a curious expectancy.

"Is it possible he really means it, then?" she asked herself. She had not believed it before.

They all resumed the seats they had occupied during the reading of the will, and an air of suspense, produced by the arrestive note in Garth's voice, pervaded the family circle.

He rose, and took up his stand on the hearth-rug, facing them all. His face was white and set, as it had been throughout the day, but his tone was perfectly deliberate and clear.

"Just now," he said, "St John was speaking about Vivian Carew. Once he was my friend, latterly he has been much less—and much more. Rachel loved him, and Marion regarded him as a brother. For her sake—Marion's sake—if not for his own, I desire at last to remove a misapprehension from your minds. He was innocent."

St John at least could not restrain a start of surprise. He stared hard at his brother.

"How do you know?" he asked. "Why didn't you tell us so before?"

"That is part of the story I am about to relate to you," continued Garth. "It is a story which will cause pain to you all, I fear, but the time has come when it must be told. For some time, for years, in fact, I have led a double life, a life of hypocrisy, a life of despair in the midst of success. Marion was aware of this almost from the first, and, later, Rachel as well. The loyalty of these two women, my wife and my sister, has been more than any words of mine can do justice to, and has been rewarded, I regret to say, with the death of one and the ruined happiness of the other. Since my marriage I suppose I have been one of the most miserable men in England. If I had listened to Marion's advice I should have made this confession before, and I have come to the conclusion at last that no consequences it might have entailed could have caused her and myself as much misery as my silence. I broke her heart, and she was the best wife a man ever had -- I broke her heart and killed her, and the only reparation I can make her now

is to fulfil the promise of confession I gave her before she died."

"Confession!" repeated St John. He imagined that grief had driven his brother out of his mind. "It is a strange word to associate with you, Stephen!"

"You think I am mad," said Garth sadly. "Would that you were right! It was I who was involved in the death of Joe Williams. No—no, I did not murder him, thank God! But we met and quarrelled in the dark on the cliffs where he was waiting for Vivian, and, in endeavouring to strike me, he lost his balance, and reeled over the edge.

"An instinct of prudence, nothing worse, kept me silent at first. It seemed unnecessary to connect myself with a disagreeable affair. Then I went to the Island to take Macdonald's place, and it was there I heard of Vivian's arrest.

"I was horrified. My first, my natural impulse, was to go home at once and clear him at any cost. But the men of the Island, the fathers of suffering children, the husbands of dying wives, would not let me go, and I yielded perforce, with a mingling of uneasiness and relief.

"It was then that the idea of remaining silent entered my head for the first time. Instead of sending a message to the mainland, as I might have done, I took time to think about it. I, who knew Vivian was innocent, could not believe he would be convicted. It seemed to me he could suffer no more than a period of suspense at most, while I had more to lose. If I spoke so late I should be asked why I had not spoken before; my prolonged silence on the subject of this man's death would be construed as guilt. Why should I run such a risk for the sake of saving him a brief anxiety? I too was innocent of crime—no more a murderer than he. If either of us were to blame for this misfortune it was he who brought the man to Carnruan. At the best the reasons of our quarrel would be demanded, and if I told the whole truth, which I should be afraid to conceal, the man's identity would cast an irreparable slur on myself and on you all, which would damage my prospects at the outset of my engagement to Marion when it was necessary, more than ever, that I should succeed in my career."

An inarticulate cry broke from Mrs Garth's lips; she clasped her hands, and gazed in agonised inquiry at the sinner self-confessed.

"Yes, mother," he said in a low tone, reading her question in her eyes, "I was his son!"

"I want you to understand exactly what my feelings were at this time," he continued. "I was pinning all my faith upon Vivian's acquittal. When I heard that he had been condemned it was a terrible shock to me. By the same post I received the offer to assist me to start in Harley Street. It seemed to me that the world was at my feet, and it would be madness to forego such an opportunity. Apart from any selfish considerations, I had three women dependent upon me, and another about to become so—for affection at anyrate. I knew if I came forward at this hour I should bring ruin upon myself, and sorrow to all of those I cared for. In all probability I should be accused of having murdered my father, whose existence was so obviously a disadvantage to me, and I was as innocent of this crime as Vivian.

"I considered that the fortunes of war were against him, and that I should be performing an act of folly to put myself in his place. My life was of value to the world, his was not. I felt that I had a great career before me, which would benefit the human race, while he was a man who would merely idle away his time in the pursuit of pleasure. Elevated by a sense of my own importance, I could not consider it otherwise than a waste of good material to throw myself away in order to save him. Honestly, I do not believe I was selfish—at least not consciously—in arriving at this decision; that I was not vain I have proved. 'The greatest good to the greatest number' had always been one of my theories of life. I put it into practice now. I sacrificed Vivian to save my own more valuable career."

St John groaned, and bowed his face in his hands. The young priest was obviously overwhelmed, very pale, shaken, horrified. Constance, on the contrary, sat stiffly erect, her face white and rigid, her eyes downcast. Mrs Garth wept silently, and Mamie's lips were trembling as though she were going to cry. Only Rachel was attentive without emotion. It was no shock to her; she knew. She was interested, that was all, in listening to

Stephen's account of himself, and in marvelling at the courage he displayed at the great denouement. There was not even a tremor in his voice. He of them all was the most self-possessed. How could he do it? Had he no feeling—or was feeling exhausted in him by what he had already endured?

"I am trying neither to mitigate nor exaggerate my conduct," he said, "so I will confess that I considered my decision justified for some time afterwards, and should not have regretted it, although I pitied him, if Marion had not discovered my secret. You can imagine her standpoint: she was a woman and religious. From that day till the day of her death we were husband and wife in name only.

"In spite of her terror of what she called my crime she loved me still, and it became the object of her life to urge me to confess. This I declined to do, much as I cared for her. I chose to look at things from the practical, materialistic point of view, and I still maintained that my conduct was justified. And because I had saved myself for the sake of the world, I dedicated to it every hour of my existence. I gave myself no relaxation, as you know; I took no more sleep than was absolutely essential to enable me to continue my life's work. And she encouraged me in my efforts; she never bade me rest, although she must have seen sometimes that I was overdone. I thought that if I could only discover this cure for tuberculosis I should have paid for the licence I had given myself, more than paid for it, and that she would admit at last that I had chosen well.

"But when the success came she rejoiced with the world, not with me. The reward of my toil was a drop of expiation perhaps in the ocean of my crime—no more. And the grim satire of the child's death from the very disease I had made my study she regarded as God's verdict on my atonement.

"It was about this time I learned the secret of Rachel's engagement to Tregenna." Here he glanced at Rachel. "This man, it seems, had been an unsuspected witness of the scene on the cliff. He knew the truth and threatened to expose me unless the girl became his wife. For my sake she consented. She was as good and loyal a sister as Marion was a wife.

"The approach of her wedding brought about a final rupture

between myself and Marion. She declared that if I permitted Rachel's sacrifice she would leave me for ever. I had no intention of allowing the marriage to occur, and my reassurance gave her the impression that I intended to confess, or to defy Tregenna and allow him to betray me. I perceived her mistake; and her eagerness, her joy, the renewal of her love, which she promised me as reward, almost induced me to take the step she anticipated. At the last, however, I hardened my heart again, and merely gained my end by frightening him about his wife's death, which occurred, you may remember, rather suddenly and suspiciously

"It was a shot in the dark, that was all, and I have no reason to believe it hit the mark, but—he released Rachel, and held his tongue, which was all I cared about.

"Then I went home to Marion. She was broken-hearted at the means I had used. I begged her once more to leave my soul to my own care, to condone, at least, and she refused. She declared she had only remained with me in order to use her influence on Vivian's behalf. Perceiving that she would never prevail she decided that we had better part. I reproached her with coldness; I felt it was her place to obey, not to judge, and told her if she had really loved me she would have found it easier to forgive. This had no effect upon her, and I would not even try to keep her against her will.

"I believe she devoted herself to charity; I am sure she never did anything in her life which a good woman should not do. She was almost perfect, and it was only my injustice which found her hard. I know she never touched a shilling of her uncle's money, and it was agreed between us from the first that she was merely Vivian's trustee for what should have been his own.

"She seems to have heard from him at last, and arranged a meeting between him and Rachel, which led to a renewal of their engagement. Rachel has told you herself that she was to have gone away and married him. But he was taken ill with diphtheria, and Marion sent for me."

Mamie slipped her hand through her sister's arm.

"You know already how Marion died. You do not know *why* she died. It was for my sake she tried to save him. As she saw it, this illness of his came about through me like his other mis-

fortunes. But for me he might have been well and happy. She tried to prevent his death being also placed at my door.

"She was dying when I promised her I would speak. It made her happy. 'Then shall we meet again,' she said, and smiled and kissed me. Neither of us knew then that her devotion had failed, and my confession would come too late to benefit Vivian. I tried to tell him, but I don't think he heard. Anyhow, it doesn't matter to him now—does it, St John?"

St John raised a white face, seamed with misery.

"I cannot speak, Stephen," he said. "I cannot speak till I have thought a while. The shock has been greater than I can say. That you—you of all men!"

"You agree with Marion, then?"

"How could I do otherwise—as a priest?"

"And as a man and a brother?" asked Garth, with a touch of the old sarcasm.

"As all three—priest, man, and brother—I pity you with my whole heart, for what can be more terrible than the consciousness of sin! But——"

"I am damned for all eternity!" supplemented Garth bitterly. "Yes, I know your opinion, St John; I asked you for it once before, if you remember, at Porthminster. You pronounced it pretty clearly, and your wife agreed with you."

Both Constance and St John started slightly.

"Yes, I remember," said the young vicar. "Ah, if we had only known! But not a suspicion, not an idea entered my head. How should it?" His voice broke. "Even now that you denounce yourself with your own lips it seems incredible."

"Mother," said Stephen sadly, "have I broken your heart too?"

"Oh, my son," said Mrs Garth, weeping, "my son, my son!"

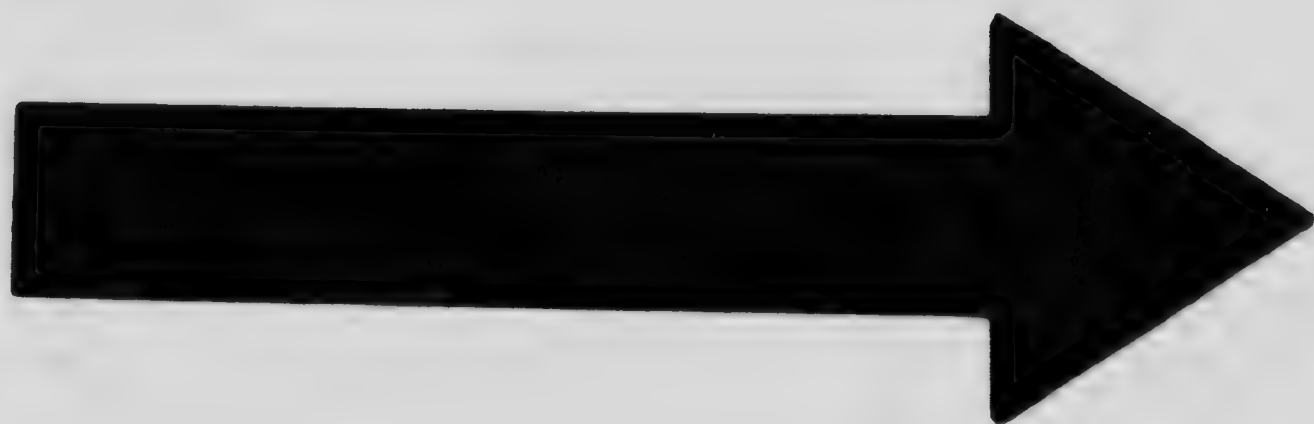
"And you, Mamie?"

"I don't know," cried the girl, and burst suddenly into a storm of tears. "It is all so—so dreadful."

"And you, Rachel?" he asked once more.

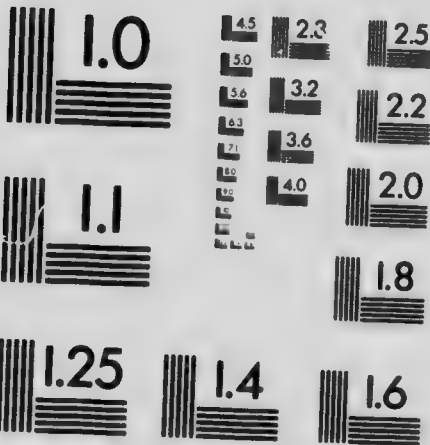
"I who loved him have forgiven you," she said, placing her hand in his, "for you have suffered more than he!"

It was Constance who spoke next.



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"It is very, very sad, what you have told us, Stephen, and we are shocked and grieved, but thank goodness the secret is in the family, and nobody else need know anything about it now poor Vivian Carew is dead!"

Garth looked up as though he did not understand her, and then an expression of faint surprise dawned on his pale, set face.

"Of course, I am going to confess," he said.

"You have confessed to us, Stephen," Rachel said. "What else should you do? Your mind is relieved, and you have fulfilled your promise to poor Marion."

"Scarcely the latter, I think," he answered grimly. "She did not ask me merely to humiliate myself; she wished justice to be done. If he had lived I should have been able to reinstate him in his old position; as he is dead, at least I can clear his memory."

"For whose benefit?" asked Constance, her voice carefully restrained. "He has no near relatives—none at all that I have ever heard of, certainly none who cared for him. We, I suppose—Rachel, and yourself through Marion—are nearest to him. It seems to me if you proclaim the truth at this date you will merely make a scandal which cannot benefit the dead, and will injure the living."

"Do you mean," asked Stephen, fixing a piercing gaze upon his sister-in-law, "that you do not wish me to speak? I thought when I broached the same subject in a veiled manner at the Bishop's palace, you were one of the most vehement in insisting that it was the man's duty to confess?"

Constance's colour heightened.

"If his father were alive I should be the first to admit, I hope, that you ought to clear his son's name at any cost. But what good will the creation of such a scandal do to-day?"

"Justice!" replied Garth, sharply.

"Excuse me for saying so," she said, "but you have postponed your thirst for justice so long that it has turned into injustice. You may think it impertinent of me to speak to you in this way, but as my marriage to St John has brought me into your family, and you yourself have admitted it by inviting me to

be present this afternoon, I feel entitled to defend my own interests ; let your mother and sisters defend theirs. The disgrace of an exposure would not be yours alone ; it would reflect upon all of us. And I have my husband to think of, and my child."

St John winced, and his hands clenched unconsciously. His pale lips moved as though he were going to speak.

Garth continued to stare at his sister-in-law.

"But I promised her," he said. "I promised her!"

"Vivian was alive then."

"His death does not absolve me. I vowed to have done with the sham and hypocrisy of my life for her sake—to make the only atonement a guilty man can make, and I must—I *must* keep my word!"

Then Constance's well-controlled temper flashed a little.

"Have you nothing to say, St John?" she asked. "Will you stand by in silence and allow your innocent child's name to be smirched?"

"I can understand," said St John, "that it would ease Stephen's mind to confess, but I am also bound to admit that your argument, Constance, is based upon prudence and common-sense."

"Of course," broke in Mamie, with a pathetic sniff, "I couldn't think of marrying Adolphus if this came out. I wouldn't be so mean as—as to connect him with our disgrace. What's the use of making a fuss now, Stephen? It's too late to do anything but harm."

Garth remained silent, with his eyes on his mother's face, as though asking for her opinion also.

"There—there is a great deal of truth in what they say," she faltered. "You stand so high, Stephen. Your fall would make all the greater noise on that account. Oh, I cannot bear—I cannot bear to think of it!" Her features twisted, and her hands locked as though the mere thought of it was agony. "I should be unable to live through it," she added. "I have been so proud of you, Stephen! It would kill me."

Garth turned to the high mantelpiece, and rested his hot forehead against the cold, unpolished stone. Some of

Constance's knocks were hard ones ; several of them had struck home.

Curiously enough, it was the materialism of his nature which perceived the justice of her demands—that materialism which had once sided with him against Vivian. The hard common-sense she showed was exactly what he had once shown himself.

"I, my husband, and my child, against you," she said to him in other words, summing up the new situation which had some elements of the old. "We are innocent, and you are guilty, or at least unfortunate. Why should we be pilloried for the sake of your soul?"

She was one of the last members of the family with whom he had expected to reckon ; but it was so natural, now he thought it over, that it should be she who cared the most : her whole existence was cast in the mould of convention. To cultivate the world's good opinion was her aim ; to be, in herself and her belongings, above the tongue of scandal, to advance quietly with St John along the road to prosperity and honour, unhampered by anything disgraceful which would put her at a disadvantage among other women, and leave a flaw for ever in the armour of her self-satisfaction. Her ambition was dictated by filial pride—conjugal pride, maternal pride. She desired her household should be in perfect order—how admirable!—that there should be no dirty corner, no dark cupboard, in which she would be ashamed for her acquaintances to look. It was not quite the ambition he had entertained, but, allowing for the different circumstances, equally natural no doubt, and far—yes, far more commendable ! And as they were only relations-in-law—and she could not be expected to have a deep affection for him, it was quite right, from the practical point of view which he always studied himself, that she should feel more aggrieved even than his own people, and more eager in self-defence.

"A very good wife for St John," he mused. "He will go far with her. She has just the calculating qualities he lacks—just the right amount of hardness to counteract his tendency to visions and ideals."

It was like playing with dolls after he had been playing with

souls. Marion had died in his arms the other night, and to-day this woman said to him: "Break your heart in silence if you like, but no speck of mud must be splashed upon our immaculate garments from your wallowing in the mire."

Selfish? What right had he to call her anything of the sort? No doubt she quite failed to grasp his feeling about Marion. She was only asking him not to make a scandal; and he had sent Vivian to penal servitude, and broken his wife's heart, and ruined his sister's life.

Yes, he had done enough mischief; Constance, voicing the opinion of his family, was right. He dared not resist their wishes. The only reparation he could make them for the shameful secret of his life was to veil it decently with silence, in order that they might be able to ignore at least what they could not forget.

He saw his punishment in those long moments of silent thought. At the time when he ought to have confessed he had refused to do so with singular obduracy and hardness of heart; at the time when he wished to confess Fate answered through the mouth of Constance: "Too late. It is useless to ask for mercy when it is the time of justice!"

It was the irony of Fate that he should desire of all things earthly to be clean, and that water should be denied him; that he who had been sceptical of a God should long to kneel when his stiffened limbs had lost the power to bend; that he should think of no one but the woman for whose love he had refused to pay the price she asked until she died, and, desiring passionately to give what he had withheld, and more, find that his eager hands were tied. He was never to discharge the debt he owed to his conscience and to her; all his life was to be burdened with it: sleeping he was to dream of it, waking he was to agonise over it. At every meal a ghost would sit on his right hand—the wailing, reproachful ghost of the past.

"You are quite right, Constance," he said at last. "It is not just to make you all pay for my peace of mind. My repentance comes too late to do any good—even to myself. Will you excuse me if I leave you now? I want to think."

"Then we may reckon on your silence, Stephen?" asked St John.

"You may."

"After all," added the young vicar in a low tone, "it will be better for yourself too; you will realise it when you are in a calmer mood. It is impossible now to repair the harm you have done. No remorse on your part can give Vivian back his life which might have been so different. And your talents are valuable to other people. Cannot you find solace in the consciousness of doing your best?"

"Of course," said Garth, "I have always done my best. You don't understand. Never mind."

St John drew back a little huffily. He had spoken to his brother in a tone of Christian gentleness and forbearance, which he had deserved a better reception, in his opinion, than Stephen's half-brusque, half-impatient reply. It was true he did not understand. His brother, whom he had known all his life, had become as a stranger to him—as a stranger whose conduct inspired horror and anguish instead of admiration, whose true character was a mystery, whose thoughts he could not follow. It was a hideous disappointment, a frightful awakening. The discovery that his father had been disreputable had been a shock, but nothing to this. Distance had dimmed the ugliness of the thing which had pained him, making it little more than a vision of the "might have been" which happily was not. Stephen's assurances of the old man's death had eased his mind, although unconsciously perhaps; it had never seemed quite possible that he could have a father who had been silent for twenty years, of whom he might be ashamed.

But this—this was as real as his own body and brains, as the sunlight, as his wife and child.

That it should be Stephen of them all who had stumbled, and stumbled so badly, on the steep and narrow way!—Stephen, whom he had always regarded as a rock of righteousness; Stephen, the elder brother for whom his love and admiration had grown with his growth; Stephen, who had been the domestic ambition through so many years, the staff of his mother, his sisters' guardian, his own guide, mentor, and friend!

How true it is that no man knows his brother! The mystery of the human soul, who can fathom it? He had always looked

upon Stephen as his ideal of a man—a little lax in religious observances perhaps, not quite such a zealous churchman as he could have wished, but a man whose word was his bond, whose name was a synonym for honour, whom every woman might trust and every man esteem.

The disillusion was more than he could bear.

As Stephen walked to the door the young priest sank upon the couch and hid his face.

"This is the most miserable day of my life," he said.

Constance was a good wife. She went to him and put her arm round his neck.

"Poor St John," she murmured. "Poor boy. I am so sorry. But we must bear up. As my father would say, it is God's will. And these crosses may only be given to remind us of our own weakness, as a caution to guard our own footsteps lest we stumble too. We must console ourselves by remembering how much worse it might have been! Suppose he had not warned us of what he contemplated! Suppose he had not warned us! We should never have been able to hold up our heads in the county again."

Rachel laughed. The unexpected sound startled everyone. They thought she must be hysterical. Perhaps they were right.

CHAPTER LXI

WAITING FOR THE DAWN

WHEN Garth was alone at last he ought to have broken down; it would have been the only natural, wholesome sequel to the nervous strain of the last few days. Unfortunately, he did not. His bloodshot eyes were dry, and he paced his bedroom thinking thoughts which were not good for any man.

He had never felt so much alone, even on the night she died. Sympathy he had neither expected nor demanded from his people, but he had asked for comprehension, which they seemed unable to give.

What a gulf separated him from every other soul on earth! They could not understand, these members of his kin, why he hungered so passionately to confess. They did not perceive the magnitude of the sacrifice they demanded of him; they did not perceive it was any sacrifice at all! They thought it was a mere impulse of emotion which he would live down—this imprudent desire of his to make a scandal in their polite little world! Even St John, who was fond of him, and more than half an idealist, had applauded his wife's attitude with solemn platitudes.

And they were all right! Theirs was the common sense, and his the dreamer's vision now.

They had become his enemies, these people whom he had loved. With their petty aims and ambitions, which were so natural and commendable—he always repeated that—they closed his mouth, and robbed him of his one hope in earth and heaven. Or would she understand? Was the intention enough without the deed? If she lived still in any shape, if the soul she spoke of was not a dream, would she not know how he had tried to keep his word, and what it cost him to break it? And would not the silent God write it down against that other reckoning in the Book?

They called him by-and-by to eat, telling him the funeral guests were. How absurd to eat when she was lying in her new-maiden bed! It was like stoking a dead fire.

Hours passed. It was quite dark, and then the moon came out, and the smell of the soil entered through the window with the gentle sighing of the tide upon the shore. He stood long looking out upon the bare, undulating country and the shimmering sea. This was his last night at Carnruan. He was going away to-morrow, and he would never come back again.

When the hands of his watch pointed to eleven he went out quietly by one of the drawing-room windows, which he left ajar. Carnruan was long ago sunk in sleep, and not a soul was stirring; he might have left the hall door wide with equal impunity.

His footsteps rang hollowly on the smooth, hard drive, and his shadow fell as black as ink beside him. Down to the cross-

roads it followed him, and up to the churchyard on the hill. Alone in the night he had come to say good-bye to Marion.

An hour had passed when he rose from the grave and turned away. The dark figure of a woman confronted him suddenly at the gate. The moonlight shone on her face.

"Rachel! What are *you* doing here?"

"I knew," she said quietly, "that if I waited you would come." She slipped her arm through his, and they took a few steps in silence.

"Poor Stephen. Can I do anything?"

"No, dear."

"I daresay you thought it mean of me not to interfere. But it was of no use. Nothing could have made Constance, or even St John or mother or Mamie, understand that a man should hunger to be pilloried, to be despised."

"Ah, you understand!" He kissed her hand. "Perhaps God will understand too."

"Besides," she said sadly, "they were right, you know."

"Yes."

"Constance and St John have a child, and I suppose that makes people selfish. But it isn't that. They really can't see. . . . They think you are mad to want to throw away, for nothing, the position you have had such a struggle to obtain."

"For nothing!" he repeated, with a faint smile.

Again the brother and sister walked in silence side by side, their black, mingling shadows an emblem of their dark and closely interwoven lives.

"You are going away to-morrow, Stephen, are you not? When are you coming to Carnruan again?"

"Never," he replied.

Her breath quickened; her arm pressed his arm closer against her side.

"When shall I see you again?"

"Never, Rachel."

"I knew, I knew!" she cried, with a gasp, "that is why I looked for you to-night. Where are you going?"

"I shall decide to-night. Somewhere," he added, "where a man's work is wanted most, where I can pay off a little of my

debt, where I can give my best without earning praise which burns like vitriol, and rewards I do not deserve."

"Will you write to me?"

"Yes. And you, Rachel? What is your life to be?"

"Oh! I shall remain at home with mother," she answered. "Mamie will be leaving soon, you see. It will be quiet—and peaceful."

"You are very rich. Do you realise it? Shall you make your home at Poldinnick?"

"Poldinnick is too large for two lonely women," she replied. "We should feel lost in it. I do not think mother would care to change her style of life at her age. She is used to The Haven. She has been happy there. I can always find a use for money. There is so much want in the world."

"A dull picture for a young woman to paint. You are a girl still, Rachel. Is there nothing to look forward to—no chance of beginning again? You may marry after all!"

"Oh no!" she said, with a pained expression.

"I would rather think so, Rachel."

"Then I will say to please you—after all, who knows? I may become a happy and fashionable woman of the world—with *his* money!

Her voice died in a whisper.

Hand in hand they had reached the bottom of the hill.

Garth stopped.

"Go home, Rachel," he said hoarsely. "You should be in bed, my dear. It is midnight."

"Will it ever be morning, Stephen?"

"God knows," he answered. "I shall always be waiting for the dawn."

A week later the following item of news cropped up in the daily papers:—

"His Majesty has been pleased to confer the honour of a baronetcy upon Dr Stephen Garth, the great authority upon tuberculosis, whose discovery has made his name famous throughout the civilised world."

In the evening editions an amendment appeared:

"We are informed that the honour offered to Dr Stephen Garth has been declined, and that for private reasons, which are unstated, he is about to withdraw from his practice in Harley Street and quit England for an indefinite time. As the terms of the bequest permitted, he has appointed as his successor in control of the Garth Hospital, Dr Herbert Shepstone, a talented colleague with whom he has been intimately associated for some years, and who is thoroughly imbued with his methods and ideas.

"It is surmised that a recent bereavement has induced Dr Garth to adopt this resolution, which causes deep and widespread regret."

CHAPTER LXII

"ALL'S WELL"

"It seems to me the island ought to be over there," said Adophus Wetherby, nodding to port.

His young wife drew close to him and leaned her pretty, firm, sunburnt chin on his shoulder, and followed his gaze with earnest eyes.

"Where, Dolph?"

"What is that rising out of the sea?—a hill, surely, or is it only a cloud?"

A two-year-old child—her youngest—toddled across the deck of the big steamer which was taking them to England for a holiday, and clutched her skirts.

"Mum—m'm—mum."

Mamie, who used to hate the "little brats," let go her husband's arm to pick up the baby tenderly; but she was still intent upon the long, hilly island, now indisputably real, which was emerging from cloudland and the sea.

"Yes," said Wetherby in a subdued tone, "that is the spot, undoubtedly." He put his arm round his wife and child. "They told me we should sight it in the early morning."

Most of the passengers were not yet on deck; Mamie and Wetherby had risen at an unusual hour in order not to miss that quiet, solitary island drifting by like a dream . . . tropic seas.

A sailor, noting their interest, approached them with a telescope.

"Maybe you'd like to look through this, ma'am?" he said to Mamie. "That island's a gruesome place, though it looks so nice from here, with its hills and palm-trees. They call it the Leper Island hereabouts. There's a colony of lepers there. Directly the poor wretches sicken they bring 'em from the other islands, and they never leave it again. If you look right up on top of that hill you'll see a tombstone. It's the grave of an English doctor, who was a great man at home in London. He came out here seven years ago to take care of the lepers, and he caught the disease himself and died four years after. It was his own wish, they say, that he should be on the hill, facing east, in order that he should be the first of all the island to see the dawn!

"Queer notion, wasn't it? But people get queer notions when they're dying, and they'd as little thought of disobeying him when he was dead as when he was alive. They was just mad over the loss of him. I've 'eard, he even chose the words for his own grave:

"STEPHEN GARTH,

"Aged 39 years.

"Jesus, have mercy!"

Mamie put away the telescope. The glass was blurred by the tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Adolphus," she said, "how it all comes back!"

The child on her shoulder, rosy and vigorous as an emblem of eternal life, reached for the bright brooch at his mother's neck and gurgled with joy. And as Wetherby put his arm tenderly round his wife, the clear, brisk voice of the "lookout" sang the formula of the sea:

"Eight bells—and all's well!"

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